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AUSTRALIAN BirdKeeper

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Chattering Lories

Budgies

Finches

Trinidad

Bush Stone-curlews

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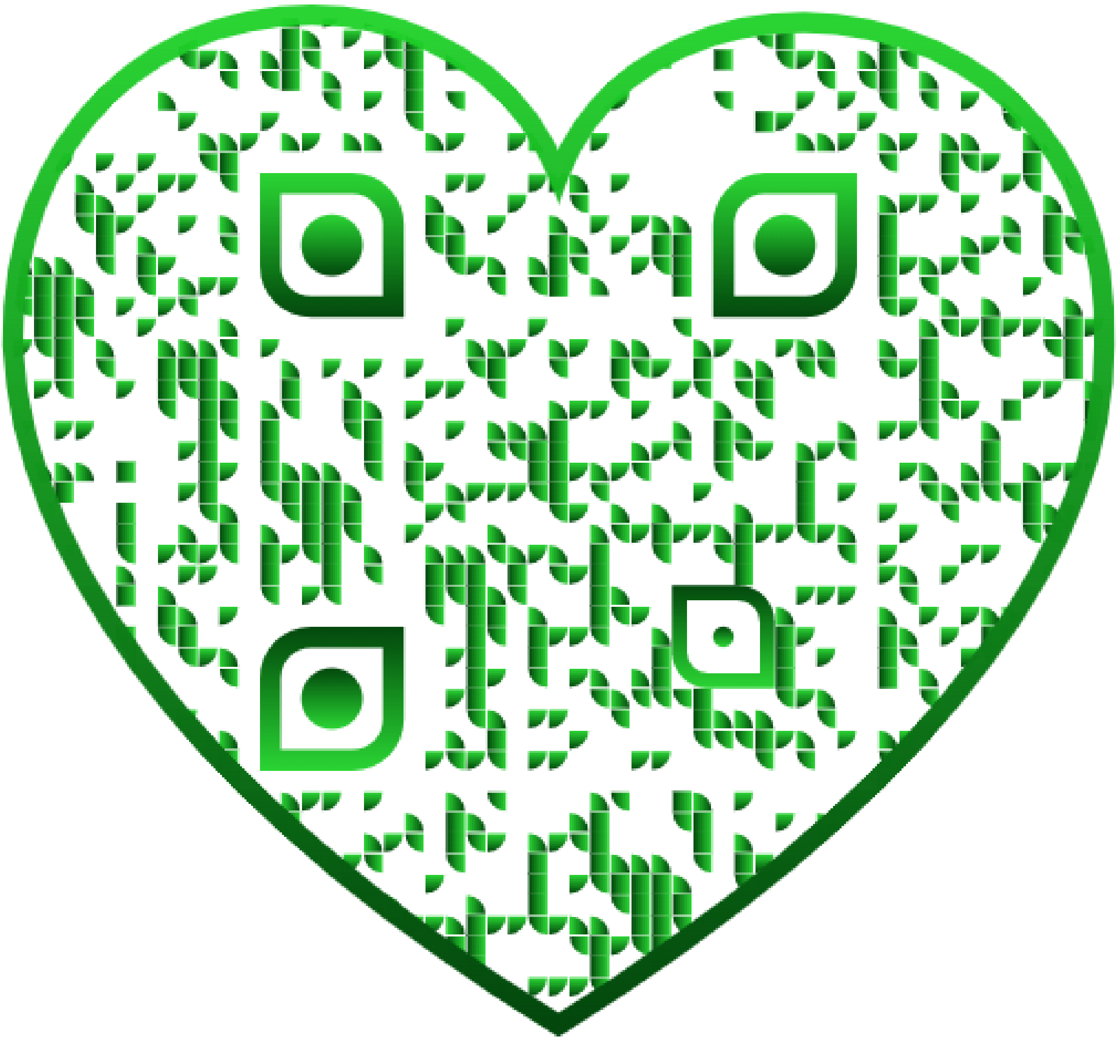

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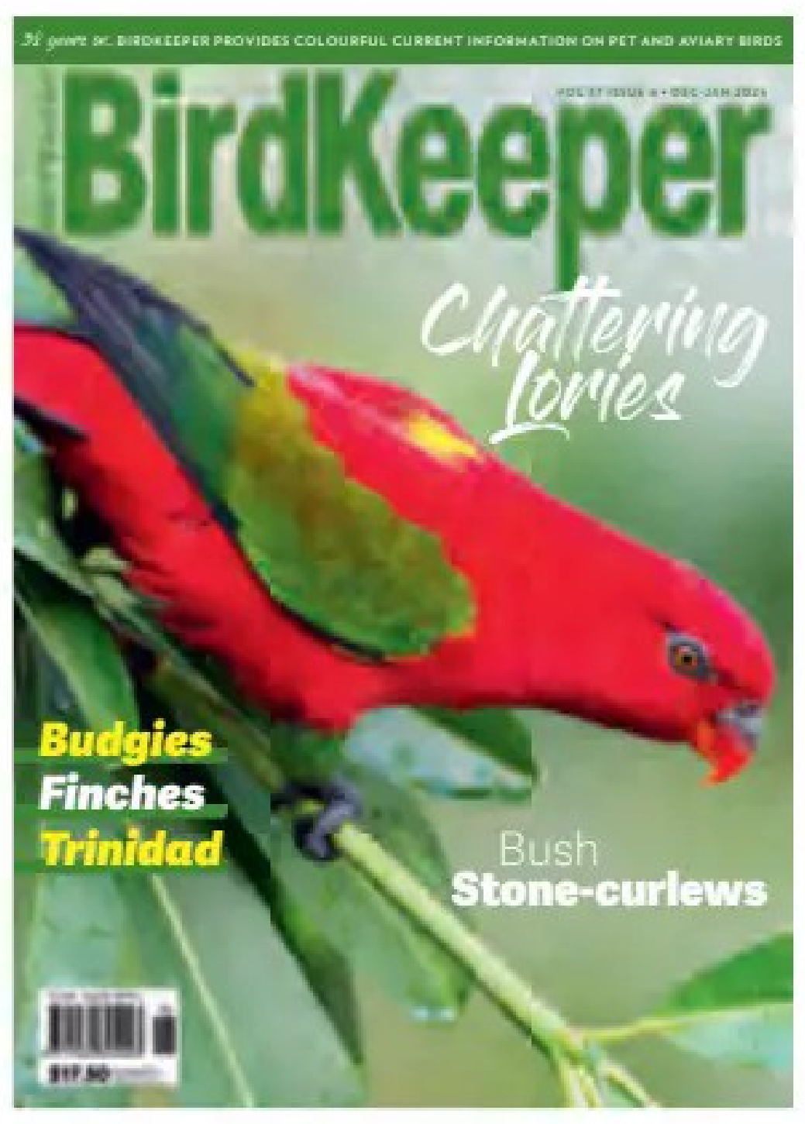

ON THE COVER
Chattering Lory
PHOTO
PETER ODEKERKEN

NEXT ISSUE
Released Friday 14 February 2025

editor's notes

FROM EDITOR
SIMON DEGENHARD

G'DAY Friends and Fellow Birdos, welcome to another bumper issue of your favourite Aussie bird mag. The year has flown by, seemingly at Peregrin Falcon pace, and we are now reading Volume 37, Issue 6 2024.

I am now 6 issues in on my tenure as Editor of ***BirdKeeper*** and feel that I have settled into the chair nicely. Sheryll Steele-Boyce, and Nigel before her, were always going to be hard acts to follow, the publication has been high-class from day one and 38 years later, I feel that it continues to be. I hope you all agree that the Magazine is still going from strength to strength.

I recently shared the article from Volume 37, Issue 5 'On The Brink Again: The Critical Role of Annual Releases in Saving the Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii*' to our ***BirdKeeper*** facebook page, to spread the news about this unfortunate development in the program as far and wide as possible. Can I please ask all who are on facebook a favour, can you assist me with this task by sharing this post? By spreading it further, more pressure will be put on the Brazilian Government to reverse its illogical decision to block further releases of this iconic species and effectively consign them to extinction once again. Extinction is not something we can just accept, so please help the dedicated Spix's Macaw Recovery team to spread the message that we support them and will not take this lying down.

I believe that we have produced another jam-packed and well-balanced issue for you all and I continue to be buoyed by the positive feedback that we have been receiving. I encourage you, our readers to offer your feedback, both positive and negative, along with any ideas you might have for future articles, as this will assist us to continue producing a magazine that you all enjoy reading.

Kicking this issue off on the opposite page, we have a fantastic article on the Chattering Lory, written by ***BirdKeeper*** stalwart and Lory aficionado, Peter Odekerken. It provides a great overview of this stunning species, both in captivity and the wild.

Following this, on page 310 we have the second part of Graham Bull's informative piece 'Maintaining a Healthy Finch Collection'. This article is a must-read for anyone with a passion for finches, especially those who are at the beginning or early stages of their avicultural journey.

Bradley R. Holland shares the news of the passing of well-known Hunter Valley (NSW) aviculturist, Nick Harris. I first met Nick well over 20 years ago, he was always a great supporter of aviculture, ready to help and encourage newcomers to the hobby. His contributions were great, and his loss will be felt by many in the bird world. See page 313.

We then move on to an article on our humble Budgerigar titled 'A Beginners Guide to Budgies Part I'. Commencing on page 314 and written by Nathaniel Coen, it is a great piece for anyone with an interest in these iconic little parrots.

From page 318, we have an interesting and thought-provoking article by 17-year-old Geordy Wynne of South Australia. Geordy reports on his high school research project which focuses on determining the most important factors required to breed Australian birds.

Steve Sass discusses the intriguing Bush Stone-curlew in his latest piece. The species is a favourite of Steve's and one that makes an interesting and rewarding aviary subject. This article commences on page 322 and is a great source of info for those who wish to keep this species and those who already do, alike.

We then move on to a fascinating read detailing Mehd Halaouate's journey to see the beautiful Shining Parrots of Fiji. From page 326, Part 1 of this article takes us to Suva in search of the Masked Shinning Parrot. Along the way, Mehd and his travel companion Bob, also encounter numerous other stunning species, both native and introduced. This is not only a great read but showcases some of Fiji's most beautiful bird species.

BirdKeeper regular, Jade Welch has penned another great article, on the Bourke's Parrot, this time around. This species is not only beautiful but an almost perfect aviary subject as well. You can read all about them from page 333.

Commencing on page 336, Vickie Lillo and her husband, Gustavo take us to Trinidad, where they encounter an interesting array of species and learn about the history of this tropical Island nation. This provides a very fascinating read accompanied by numerous photos of the beautiful species that were seen; a not to be missed edition of Postcards from Vickie.

David Pace has a great edition of Finch Charm for us, on birds in education, starting on page 342, which is a very encouraging read. Following on, one of David's students, 9-year-old Bonnie Rickards has written a fun little article about her birds at home.

From page 345, Dr Bob writes on feathers and the various problems that can occur, a subject that should be of interest to breeders and pet bird owners alike. The second half of EB Cravens' article on Derbyan Parrots then follows from page 348.

This time around in About Birds, Dr Kit Prendergast looks at the interesting subject of 'The Overlooked Song of Female Birds'. A topic that perhaps hasn't been considered by many of us, but one that is fascinating, to say the least. This article is well worth the read, starting on page 350.

To round off we hear from our other regular columnists, Rafael Zamora Padrón – Loro Parque Fundación, Sam Davis – Off the Perch, Dr. Claude Lacasse – Wild Corner, and Dr David Waugh – Loro Parque Fundación.

I hope that you enjoy this issue, the last of 2024. I extend my best wishes to one and all for the Christmas and New Year period, I hope that it is enjoyable and spent with family and friends.

Until next year, stay safe and don't forget to keep spreading the bird word!

Cheers, Simon.

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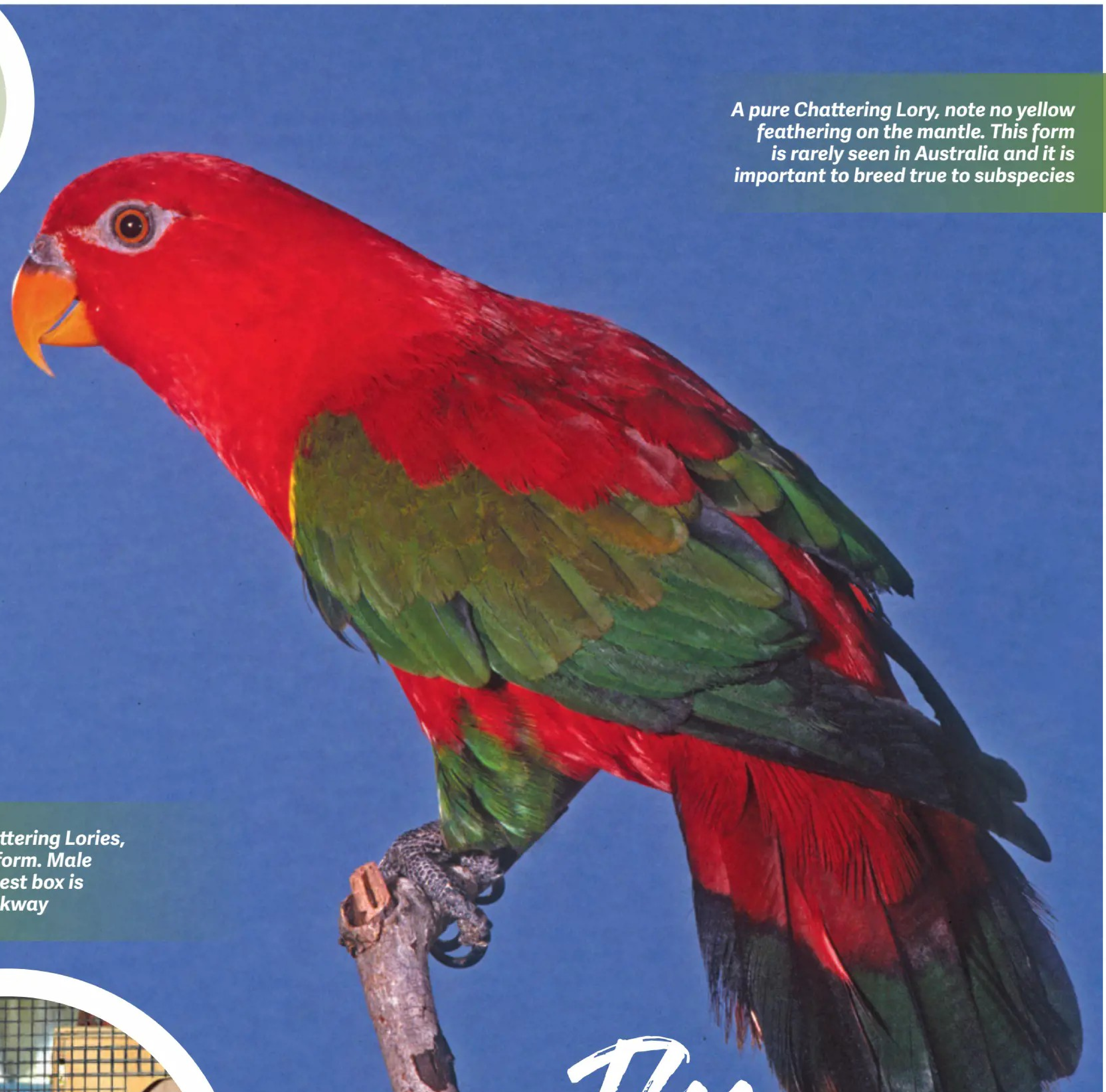
AUTHOR & PHOTOS
PETER ODEKERKEN



A pure Chattering Lory, note no yellow feathering on the mantle. This form is rarely seen in Australia and it is important to breed true to subspecies

My first pair of Chattering Lories, the yellow-backed form. Male on right. Note the nest box is attached in the walkway

The Chattering Lory

INTRODUCTION

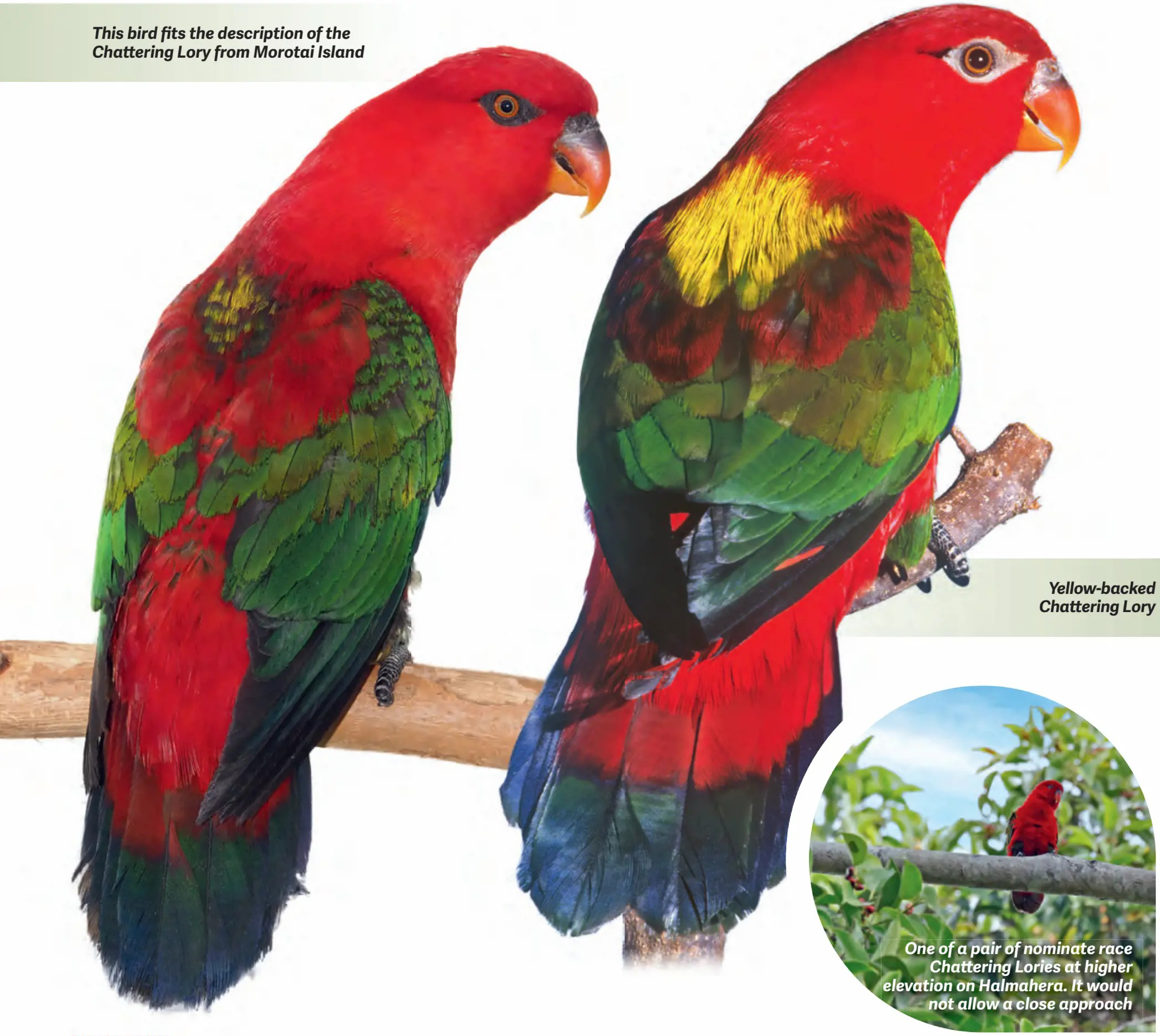
The Chattering Lory and its sub-species have been available more readily in Australia over the past two decades. I was mesmerised as a child when I first saw images of them in Rutgers' *The Handbook of Foreign Birds in Colour, Volume 2,* published in 1965, long before the classic *Parrots of the World* by Forshaw and Cooper. As a child, it was but a dream to even think of seeing one alive. So, in the early 1990s, when the importation of some foreign species was allowed for a short period, I decided to import a pair because those still in existence in Australia were extremely difficult to obtain. I believe that at the time, the only person in Australia to still have them was Mr. Sperber in Victoria.

MY FIRST CHATTERING LORIES

I managed to get two birds, which ended up being two males, unfortunately. One male was decidedly dominant over the other. I eventually managed to get a female, a very nice specimen and thought that at the price I had paid, it warranted being careful with which male I placed her. I thought I wouldn't take the risk, so I paired her with the least dominant male, and they seemed quite happy together. They were adults, and a good 8 months later, and after the expected breeding season, no inclination to breed was observed.

I then decided on the (concerning) alternative, to introduce her to the very dominant male. I placed her in the aviary with him, which was probably the riskier way to do it, as this aviary was already his territory. Once she was in the aviary, I stood close by to observe what was going to happen, with a net in my hand, ready to intervene immediately if need be. The male launched himself along the perch at speed directly at her, with me thinking oh hell, what have I done? The female saw the male come at her and just crouched on the perch, with the male ending up next to her and arching over her back, emitting the almighty harsh hiss that the species is known for. He did not attack her but just let her know who the boss was, and they formed a wonderful, productive pairing. I don't advocate that this is the best way to introduce birds to each other, but I had no real alternatives for introduction at the time as, for one, I had no facilities to house her next to him whilst they had time to get to know each other through a wire barrier.

In this article, I will relate my experiences in breeding the Yellow-backed form over several years and then, subsequently, my success with other pairs that I have owned.



This bird fits the description of the Chattering Lory from Morotai Island

Yellow-backed Chattering Lory

One of a pair of nominate race Chattering Lories at higher elevation on Halmahera. It would not allow a close approach

SUBSPECIES

The nominate form of the Chattering Lory *Lorius garrulus* has seldom been available in Australia, but I have seen the occasional specimen. There is no real explanation for this lack of availability of the nominate form because they hail from the largest island in the North Moluccas, Halmahera. You would assume that because of this fact, they would initially be more readily captured and, therefore, more common in captivity. The nominate form has no yellow or, at most, a few small streaks of yellow on the mantle.

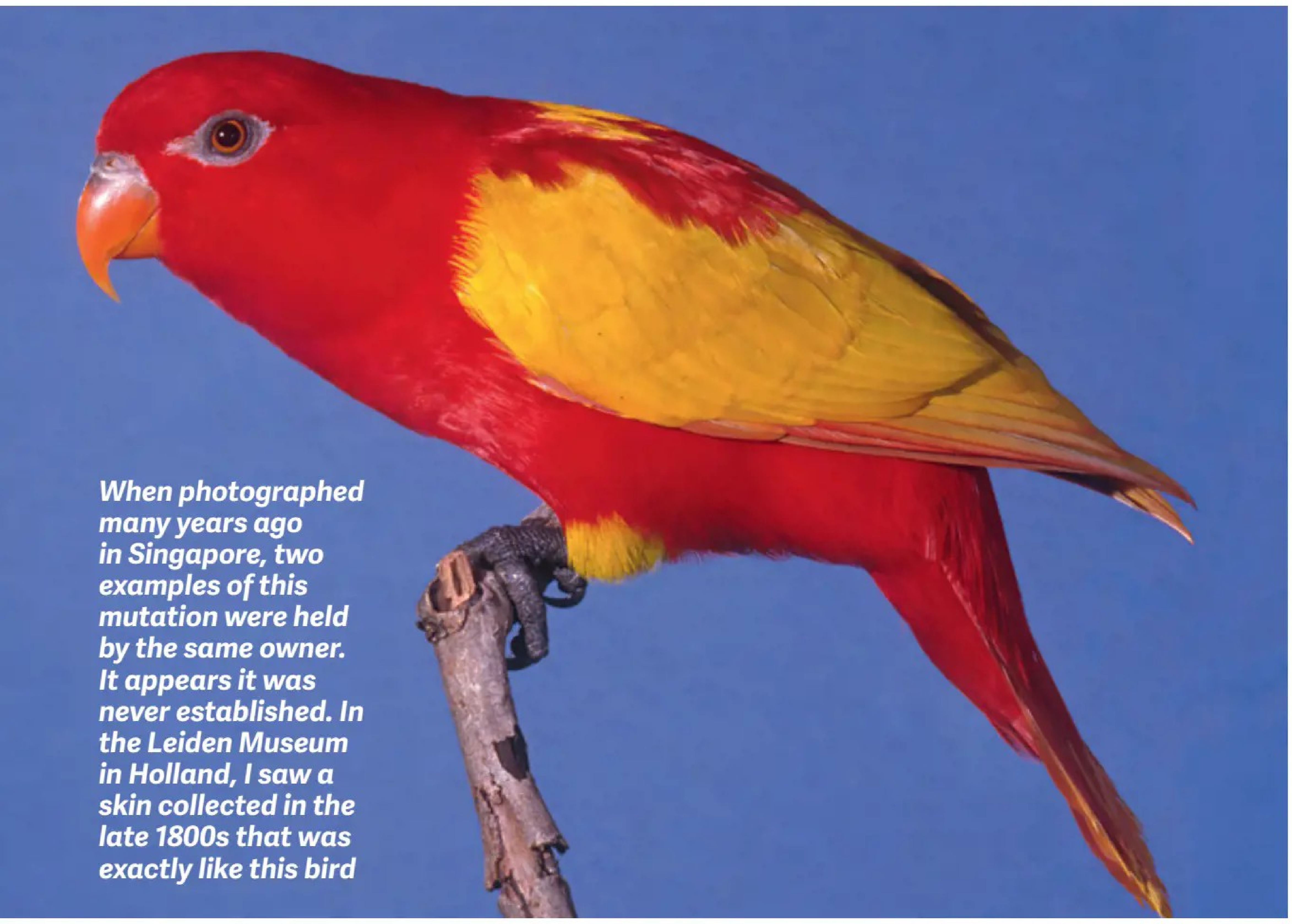
I have visited Halmahera and found them decidedly rare on the island, and this is apparently due to them having been heavily trapped and, of course, habitat destruction as well. For the locals, it is a favourite bird to be kept as a pet, sitting on a perch with a wing clipped and a leg tethered so that it cannot escape. For us, this is cruel, but this is how they have been and are kept by poor people who do not have the resources for aviaries, etc. Of course, they have been kept like this since man desired to keep a pet, so you could say that the local people know no better. And can we judge them? I don't think we can, even though I feel sympathy towards the bird.

Whilst travelling through the villages, I did notice that many of the pet birds had more yellow on the mantle than expected. Does this mean that some of the birds found on Halmahera have more yellow on the mantle than we first thought? Does variation exist in the nominate form, with some birds displaying no yellow and others having a small spot of yellow on their back? Or does this mean that the nominate form is so rare now that locals are getting birds from more remote islands where, no doubt, substantial trade of wild birds is still occurring? They certainly do not breed from these pet birds, so there is no likelihood of hybridisation on any island where they are found.

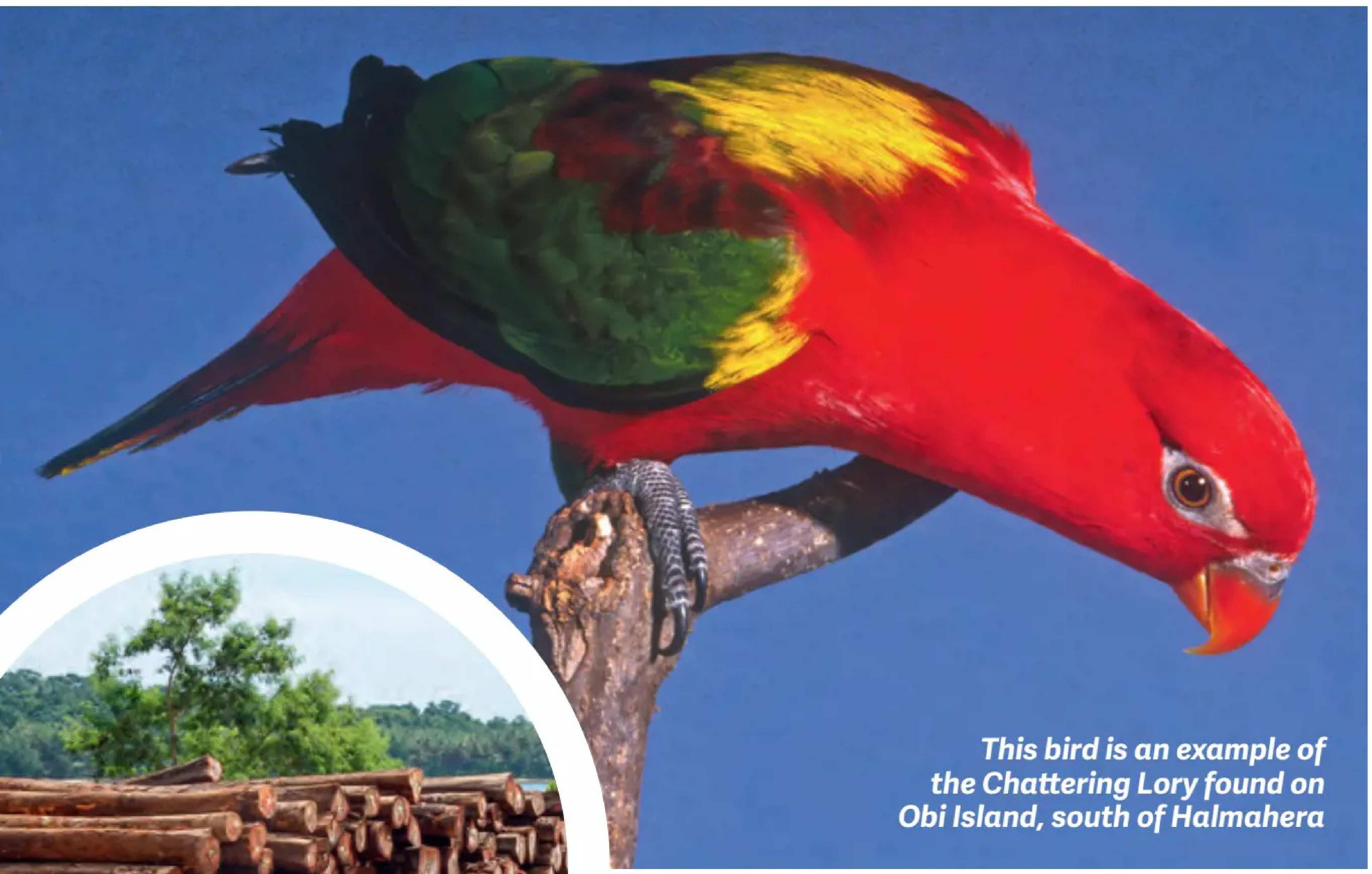
The race *L. l. flavopalliatus* is referred to as the Yellow-backed Chattering Lory in avicultural circles and is found on nearby Bacan (previously named and written as Batjan by the Dutch that colonised the East Indies) and Obi, south of Halmahera. This form has a large, well-defined, yellow patch on the mantle, and this highlights the beauty of the sub-species. My original pair of Yellow-backs were typical of the birds found in Australia. I have seen the form found on Obi and have to say that they have a larger, more striking patch of yellow.

Did I have the Bacan form? Does this form have less yellow on the mantle than the Obi form? Most of our birds were imported from Europe via England during the short period that legal importation was allowed in Australia. Did our sources in Europe hybridise the Obi form with the nominate? I never noticed many birds of the nominate form in captivity during my travels abroad, so probably not.

The final sub-species, according to Forshaw, is *L. l. morotaianus* from the island of Morotai, north of Halmahera. Again, this is a bird I have seldom come across in captivity; it has some yellow on the mantle surrounded by and intermixed with dark green feathers.



When photographed many years ago in Singapore, two examples of this mutation were held by the same owner. It appears it was never established. In the Leiden Museum in Holland, I saw a skin collected in the late 1800s that was exactly like this bird



This bird is an example of the Chattering Lory found on Obi Island, south of Halmahera

Logging and clearing for agriculture are the main reasons for the vulnerability of many species, especially so when they are confined to islands

The highlands of Halmahera, habitat of the Chattering Lory. Historically, they are mainly a coastal species, however, they have retreated to less populated areas away from the coastal villages in recent times

DRAMATIC DECLINE

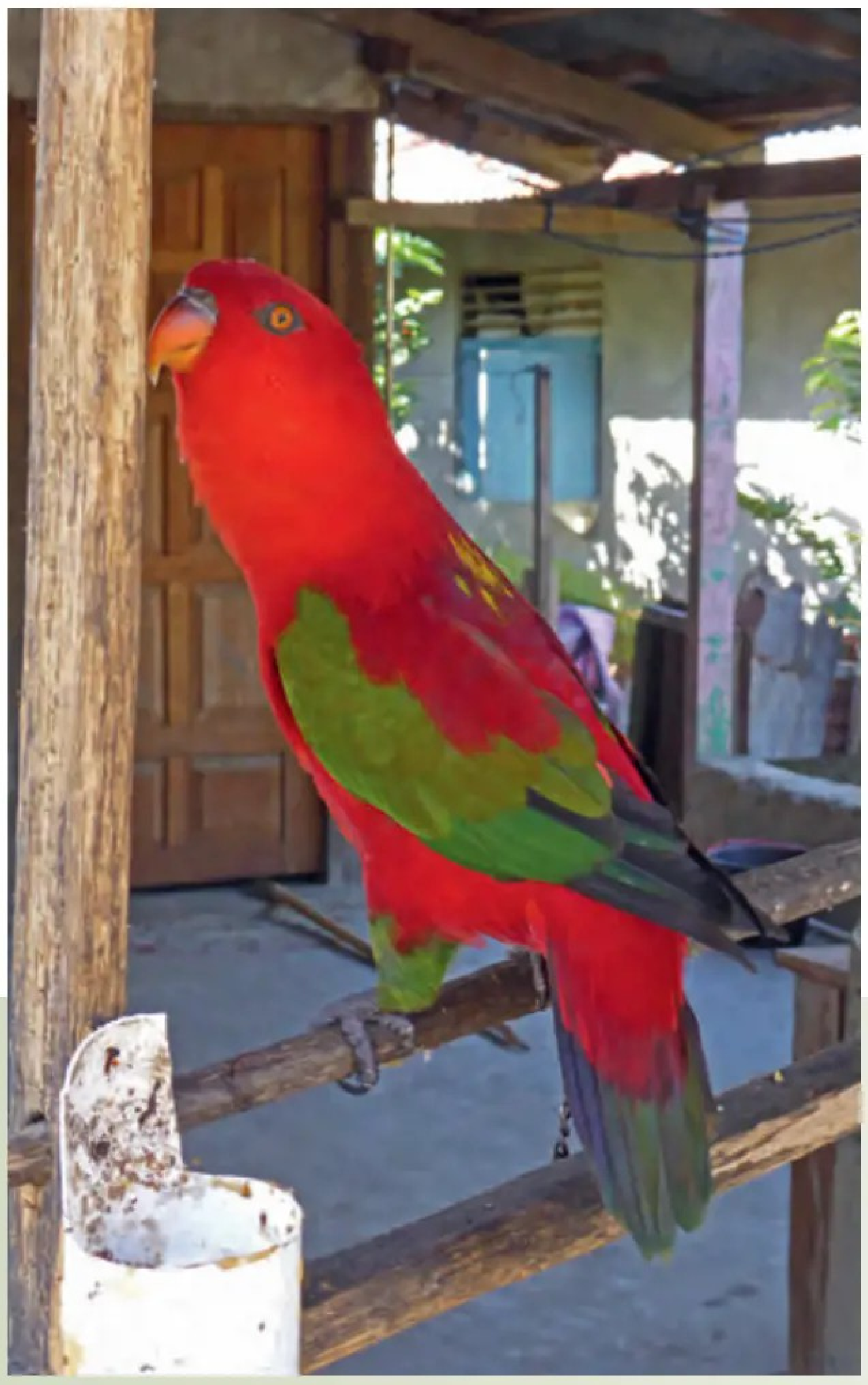
This large lory has declined dramatically in the wild, mainly due to deforestation, but trapping for the pet trade has also made a significant impact. The birds are noted to be seldom seen around settlements and are primarily coastal birds, where they were frequently seen feeding in Coconut Palms in earlier times. Indeed, whilst I was in Halmahera for a few days, we ferried across from Ternate to Sofifi, where we were collected by a driver from Weda Resort, then drove across the island from west to east. We noted a flock of Violet-necked Lories *Eos squamata* in the lowlands, feeding on Coconut flowers, but did not see a single Chattering Lory in the wild. Now, driving and bird watching don't necessarily go hand in hand unless you drive very slow with the windows open, listening for calls made by the birds.

Chattering Lories, as the name suggests, do have a wide range of calls and can be very noticeable in flight or communal gatherings. However, when feeding, they tend to be much quieter, so you can easily miss them as you drive past at speed. No doubt, we may have passed some Chatterings, which tend to be found in pairs or a pair and their offspring, so four birds at most. Unlike when we travel around Australia, where birds such as Galahs *Eolophus roseicapilla*, Rainbow Lorikeets *Trichoglossus h. moluccanus* and most of the Rosellas *Platycercus spp.* are seen regularly along the roadsides, almost regardless of speed.

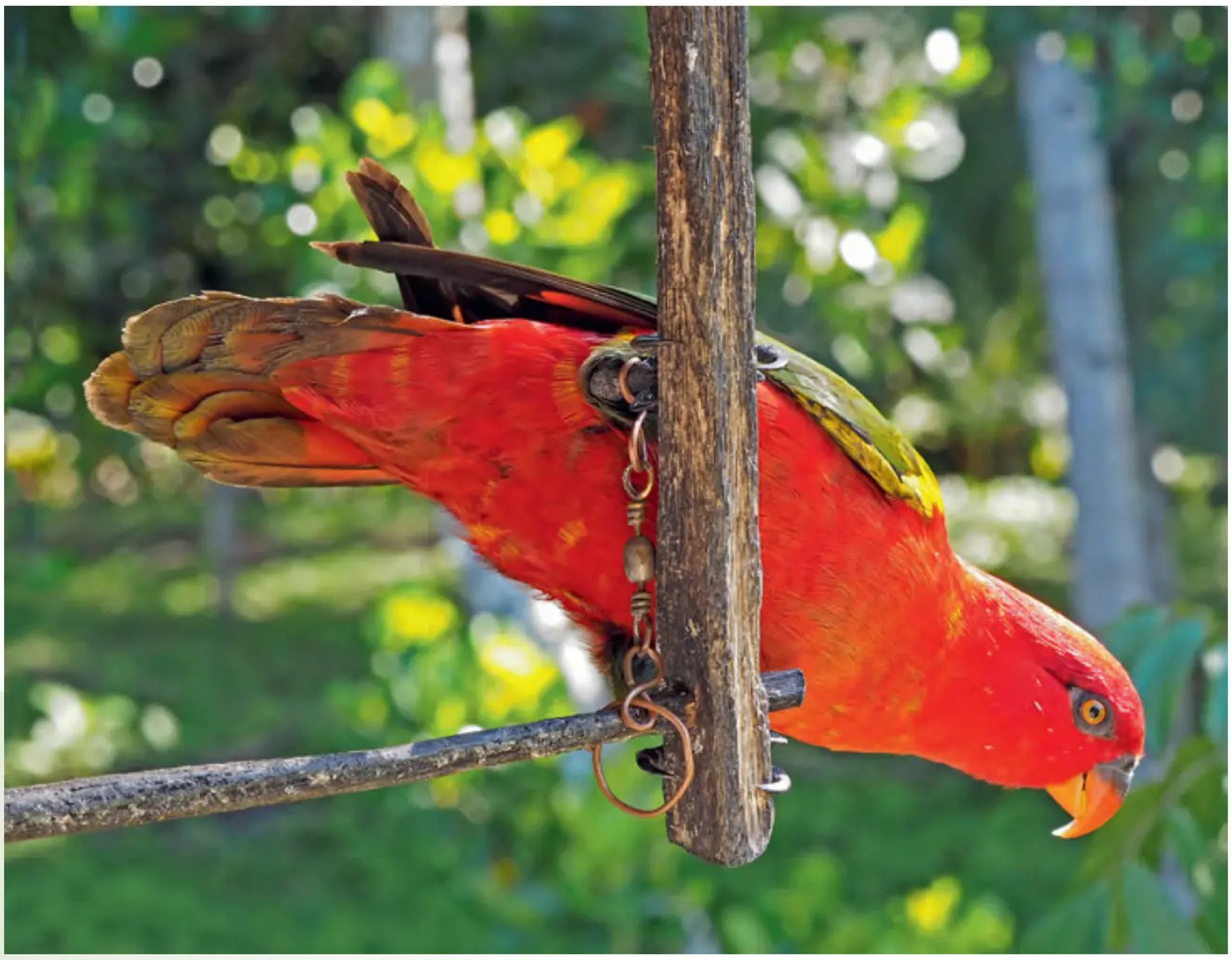
When birdwatching in the eastern lowlands, we did not come across any Chattering Lories. However, when we travelled into higher elevations to see another target species, the Blue-winged King Parrot *Alisterus amboinensis hypophonius*, we were fortunate enough to see a pair of the nominate form of the Chattering Lory. They were aware of our presence and soon flew off, but it was wonderful to see them.

We also walked through the local village of Weda and, at a trapper's house, came across a recently trapped individual, Violet-necked Lory. On inquiring about Chattering Lories, the family member told us that the species was rare on the coast and that another family member was away trying to obtain some. It became clear that it was necessary to go into the highlands and stay away for a few nights to observe them. The higher altitudes seem to be unpopulated in that region.

This species is classed as endangered by CITES.



A nominate race Chattering Lory in a village on Halmahera. A few yellow feathers on the mantle are not unusual



A captive bird in a Halmahera village chained up to prevent escape. I must admit most pets seemed in good condition, fed on local fruits such as paw paw and also sugar cane. The yellowing in the plumage may indicate poor nutrition but I doubt it

CHATTERINGS IN CAPTIVITY

The above indicates that we, as aviculturists, should try to breed true to subspecies to maintain purity in captive stock. If you have the nominate form, it is advisable not to breed them with the Yellow-backed form, which is the more common type in captivity. I know it is easier to make this statement than to put it into practice, and I have found this to be very difficult to achieve when, in captivity, we have a limited gene pool. It is also sad to see a single bird of the nominate form kept alone, waiting for a partner when Yellow-backed birds are available to pair with it. They are social birds and need interaction, such as mutual preening and play.

I may be off the mark here, but I get the impression that the Chattering Lory has dropped in price in recent years as availability has improved due to better breeding results, which has then resulted in those more interested in making money selling them to concentrate on other species that provide a higher return. This is a worrying situation that occurs around the world in aviculture. Once a species goes into the hands of pet owners and those less capable of providing what is necessary to reproduce a species, the captive population rapidly declines. We don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past when species have been lost to aviculture as a result, which has sadly happened both in Australia and in other countries throughout the world. If you try to find many of the species that were available in Europe in the 1980s, such as the small *Charmosyna* genus, you will then understand that this is a real problem in aviculture.

A bird vendor in Indonesia with two Chattering Lories for sale. It's sad to see birds in situations like this

HOUSING

Chatterings are more suited to being housed in longer aviaries with a minimum length of 3.6m and width of 0.9m (though 1.2m is preferable). The height should be at least 2.1m for conventional aviaries and 1.2m for suspendeds. Of course, they have been kept and bred in smaller aviaries, but this is the minimum size that I would keep them in, as I believe that all birds in captivity deserve to be able to do what comes so naturally to them: fly. If you have the space and the funds to offer a larger aviary, then they will certainly appreciate this as well.

In my experience, the *Loriinae* family are not heavy chewers, so standard gauge welded mesh can be used. Galvanised tubing is ideal to use for the frame. However, some of the tube that is available today has what I would call inferior galvanising, this is usually found in cheaper stock and should be avoided, as it will quickly rust. Welded mesh should be 12mm square, as it minimises access to pests. We are all aware of mice, especially young mice, still being able to get through even this small size mesh, but smaller mesh, say 6-8mm, both impairs visibility and allows mess to build up more easily, especially in suspended aviaries. You will achieve a better visual experience by painting the wire black. However, the paint eventually needs to be reapplied, and maintenance can be an issue for busy or older aviculturists like me.

At least a third of the aviary should be protected from draughts and inclement weather using colorbond sheeting and insulated (cool room) panelling, which is ideal for the roof, particularly in areas where summer temperatures can be unbearable. Some designs allow the roof to be slightly elevated above the wire, providing air circulation and keeping the birds cooler. Enclosing the back portion of the aviary also gives some benefit of seclusion from adjacent aviaries.

NEST BOX

The nest box should be placed as high as possible so the birds feel out of reach and away from prying eyes. A box or log that is roughly 250mm square/in diameter and 300-400mm in height will suffice. Elaborate designs can be useful for the base of the box to keep the young dry, as the rearing period is significant, as it is in most of the *Loriinae*. To me, a nest box designed around a suitably sized plastic tray/tub, with a door at the back or side to allow for removal, is the best solution to keeping a nest box clean. Pairs will invariably get used to nest box inspection and cleaning. Wait until the pair is off the nest and have a clean replacement tray with new bedding ready. Open the inspection door, pull out the fouled tray, place the young in the clean tray, and within a few seconds, the chicks are on clean bedding again.

PERCHES

A variety of perches of different diameters should be installed to help exercise their feet, as occurs in the wild. This can be easily achieved by regularly providing them with fresh branches such as those of flowering grevillea, eucalyptus or bottlebrush, which they will relish. PVC and steel perches are not advised. They may save you from having to source new perches regularly, but they are cold for the birds in winter and are detrimental to their well-being. Regular new perches give the birds some entertainment as they explore the leaves and flowers. Watching them hanging upside down and jostling with each other is great entertainment for you as well.

AVIARY DESIGN

The aviaries should be designed for easy access to nest boxes, renewal of perches, changing feeding trays or bowls, etc. I like my birds to experience the natural environment, so I have designed my aviaries so they can see activity outside the enclosure, and I leave part of the roof open to give the birds access to rain and a sprinkler, as they love to bathe, especially on hot summer days.

Nest boxes placed on the outside of the aviary in an escape-proof walkway are, in my opinion, necessary to give easy access. It is also recommended to buy a pressure sprayer to clean the aviary wire and walls, as this beats scrubbing every time. This is one of the major issues faced by *Loriinae* enthusiasts: the fact that aviary walls can be soiled by the liquid faeces of this group of birds. If you design your aviaries well, you can minimise this problem, but I am preaching here on something that I have been less thoughtful about.

FEEDING

I use a mixture of BOKOMO 'ProNutro', a South African cereal for human consumption, finely blended plain biscuits such as Arnott's 'Nice' or 'Milk Arrowroot', wheatgerm, Sustagen® Hospital Formula (providing additional carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals), and malted milk powder. Importantly, this mix is low in iron content. Before feeding, I also add just enough honey or raw sugar to sweeten the mix and enough warm water for it to form a smoothie-like consistency. Blended vegetables, as described below, are added to this mix as well.

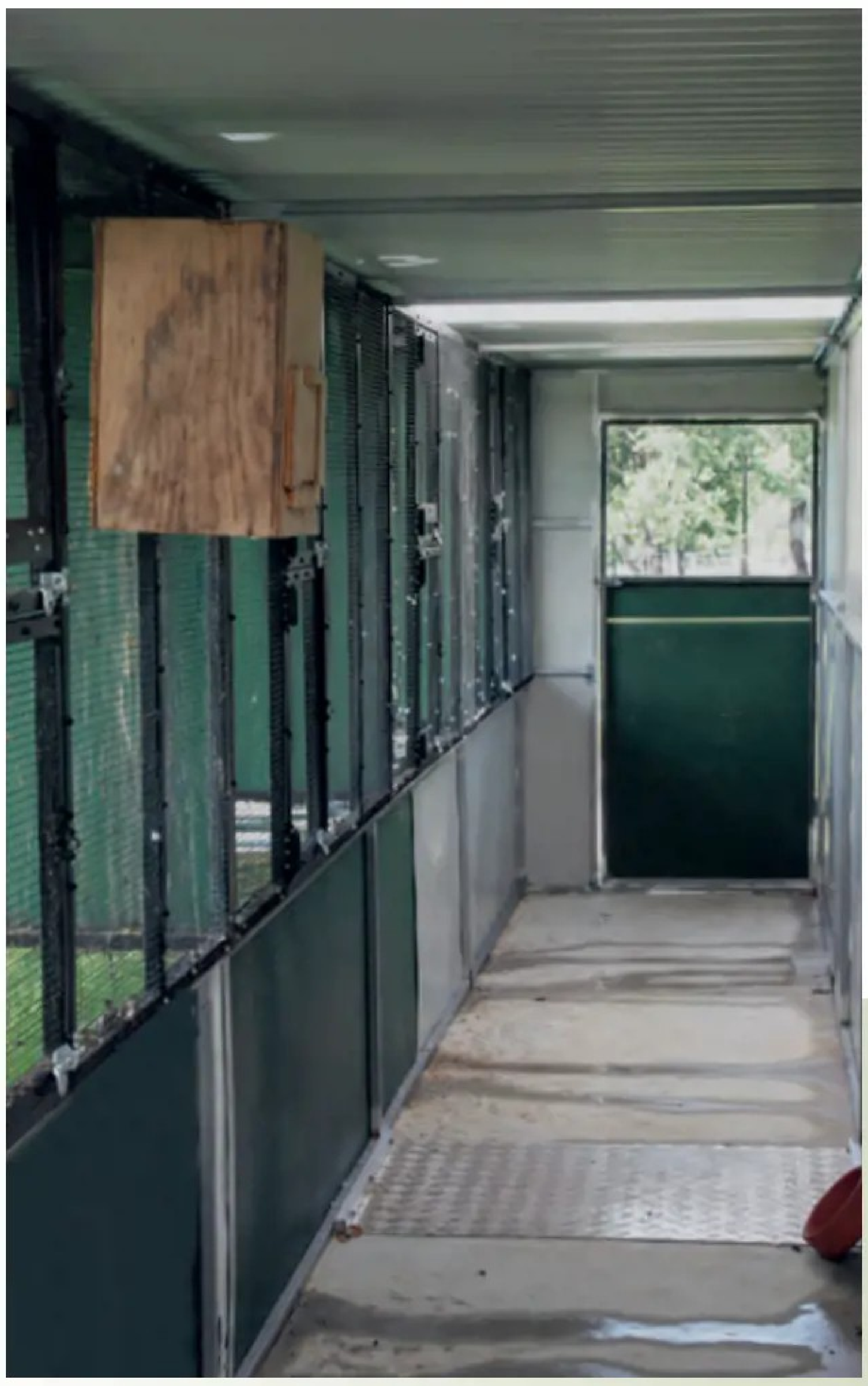
This is fed fresh every morning in clean bowls. In very hot weather, the mixture can sour within 24 hours, so I remove any leftover mixture each evening, at which time I offer fresh fruit such as apple, pear, orange, grapes, mango, pawpaw, rockmelon, etc – basically whatever your birds enjoy or is in season.

Vegetables are an important addition to the diet, although I find that my lories are not that interested in vegetables, other than corn and celery, which are greatly appreciated. I generally overcome this situation by blending a mix of frozen vegetables bought from the supermarket. This mix is thawed, blended and then mixed into the daily wet mix, allowing me to incorporate peas, carrot, corn, cauliflower, potato and broccoli into their diet. My birds' plumage glows, so I feel they are getting at least a reasonable diet.

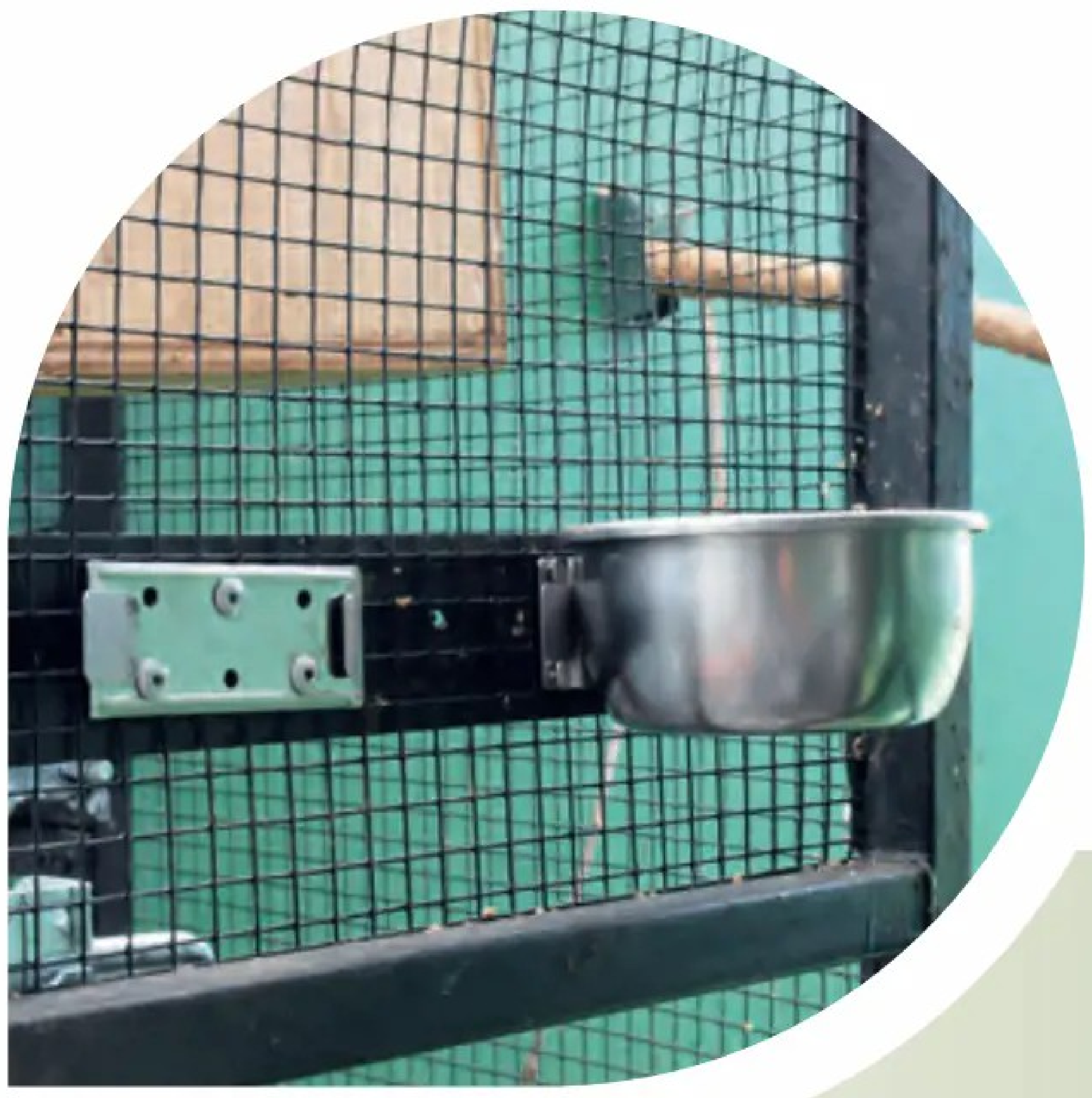
CONCLUSION

Compatible pairs can prove to be prolific breeders. They lay two white eggs, which are incubated for approximately 25 days, and the young leave the nest at about 70 days of age. I always felt that my dominant male needed to be watched in case he was overly aggressive, but he proved to be the perfect parent. Chattering Lories are aggressive birds, like many nectar feeders, right down to tiny Hummingbirds. Never assume that it is safe to introduce any other birds into an aviary housing Lories.

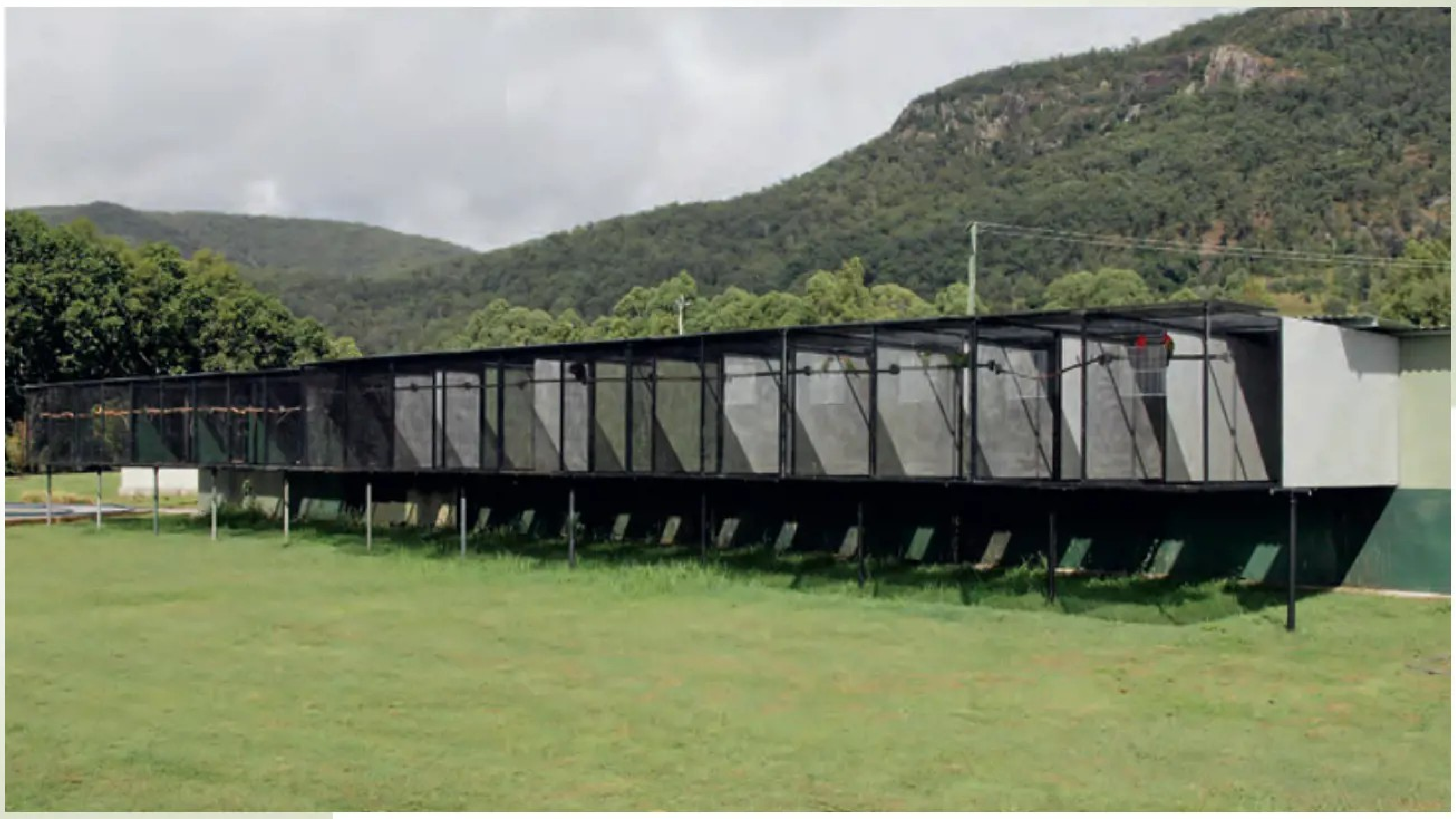
This species is full of character and will show an interest in what you are up to around the aviary, coupled with their wavering and nasal sounding 'hiss' like calls, they are a delight for the aviculturist. I feel that we must ensure their availability in aviculture for generations to come. abk



Escape proof walkway at the rear of a bank of lory aviaries. Note the nestbox mounted on the outside of the aviary to allow easy access for nest inspection and cleaning, etc



Food bowl mounted to the inside of the aviary door for easy access



Suspended avairies suitable for housing lories

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY

Finch Collection

PART II

AUTHOR
GRAHAM BULL

PHOTOS
SIMON DEGENHARD

A Painted Firetail kept in a planted breeding aviary

REGULAR PREVENTATIVE TREATMENT ROUTINE

As with the quarantine phase, the only chemical medications recommended to be used regularly in a finch collection are drenches used for worms and coccidia.

In determining how often you should drench your finches, you should take into account the species you keep, your local climate, the type of aviaries your birds are housed in and the diet you are regularly providing to your birds.

WORMING

If you specialise in non-insectivorous species, such as Gouldians or Zebra Finches, this will reduce the need for more regular worming as non-insectivorous species have one less common worm infection hazard compared to insectivores. Many insects act as intermediate hosts for certain stages in the life cycle of intestinal parasites, so any species that eats insects has a greater chance of infection by eating an insect containing worm eggs. Similarly, arboreal (those species that prefer to avoid going to the ground) finch species such as Siskins also have a reduced need for regular worming compared to ground-loving finch species. This is due to the simple fact that aviary floors are often a favoured breeding ground for worms and their hosts, especially where aviary floors contain a build-up of bird droppings in and around where the finches feed. These finches with a reduced propensity for worm infestation should still be wormed twice per year if using a preventative medication approach.

Any partly insectivorous or ground-loving finch species should be wormed more regularly, ideally four times per year. For mixed finch aviaries containing insectivorous, non-insectivorous, arboreal and terrestrial species, I worm them all quarterly to cover the species with the greatest risk.

Fully roofed aviaries such as these are perfect for housing most finches, especially those species that spend considerable time on the ground
PHOTO GRAHAM BULL

Some breeders argue that preventative worming is not necessary as a regular routine and that worming medications should only be administered to a bird with worms. Strictly speaking, this is probably correct, but we are taking the approach of cautiously protecting the entire flock. To do so using this diagnose and treat approach would require regular individual checking of faecal samples under a microscope by someone who can identify all the common worm species from eggs through to adults. For those who wish to educate themselves to do this and who have only a few birds, this would work well. For anyone who must pay for the professional services of an avian vet and who has a larger finch collection to look after, this would be a very expensive and cumbersome approach to worming finches.

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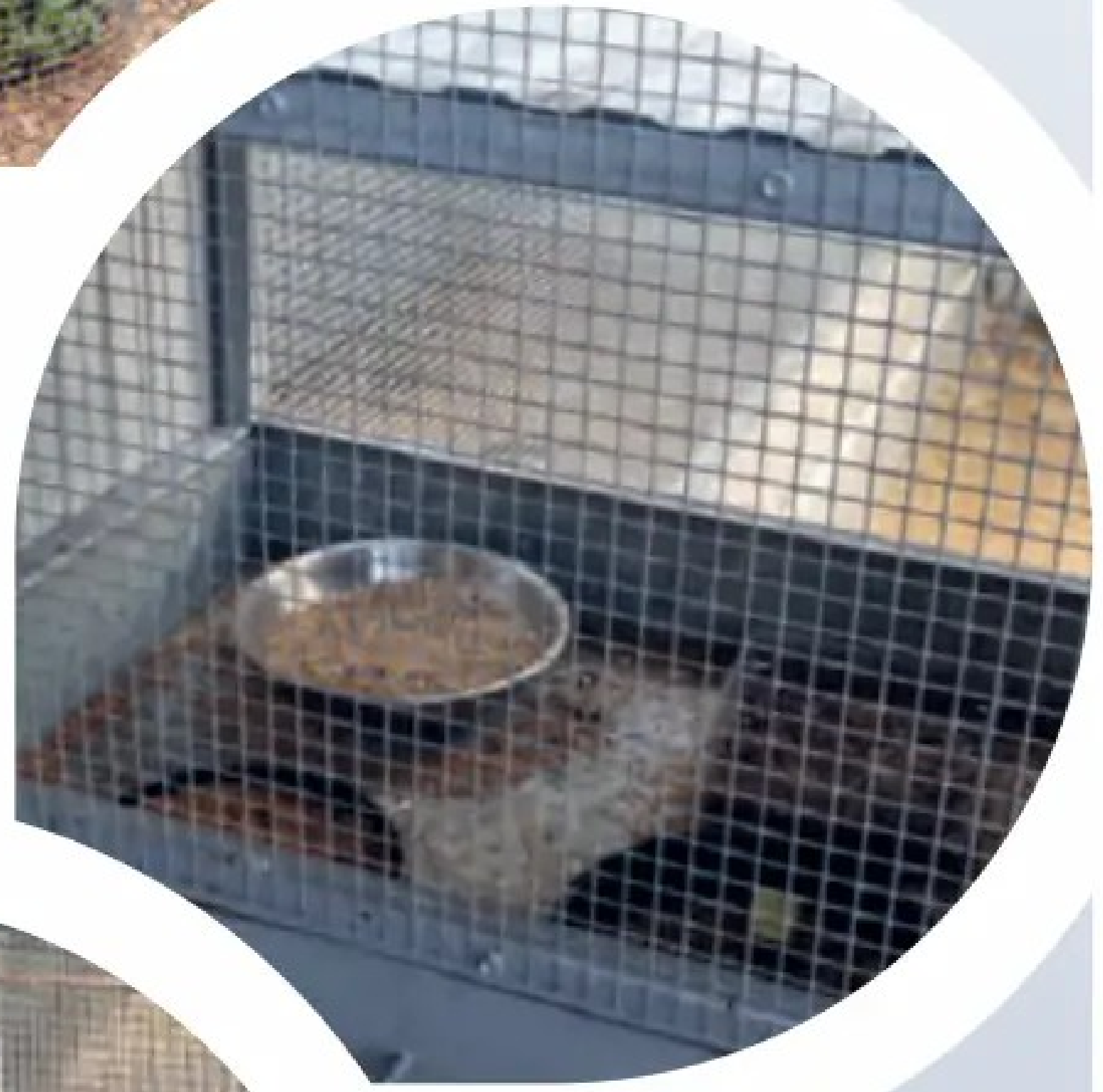
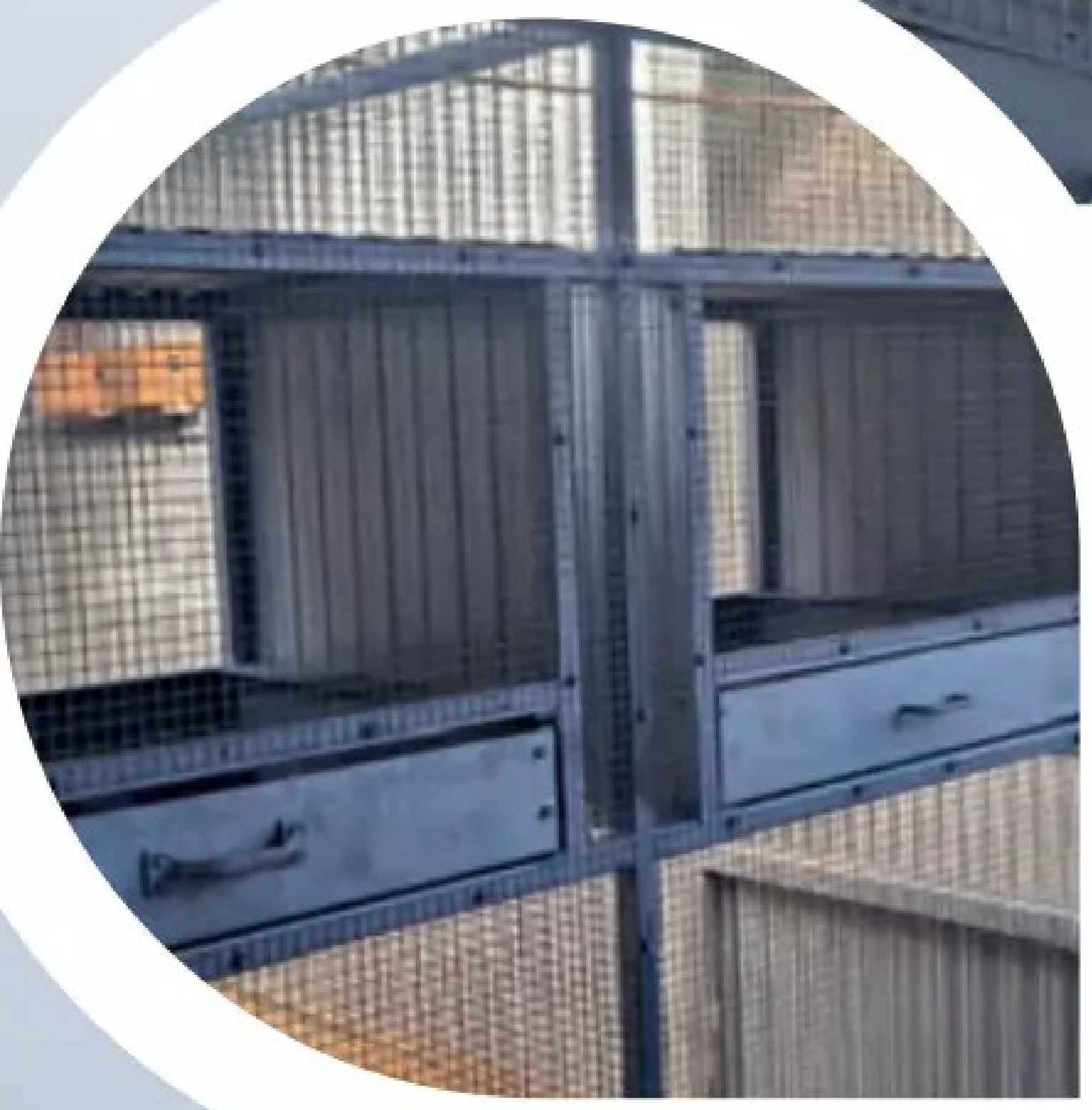
Apple Cider Vinegar

Sparse planting combined with the use of fine gravel or coarse sand as the substrate help to maintain a dry aviary floor
PHOTO GRAHAM BULL

Gravel is a great substrate for finch aviaries as it helps to keep the floor dry



A well designed finch feeding station



Finch feeding stations – note slide-out tray for easy maintenance

COCCIDIOSIS

I give my finches a preventative drenching for coccidiosis after each period of wet weather. Living in a fairly high rainfall area with a relatively humid climate seems to increase the susceptibility of finches to this protozoan. It also tends to proliferate in wet conditions, especially if aviary floors even temporarily contain wet areas. This means that finches housed in aviaries that are not fully roofed and do not have permanently dry floors are most at risk.

ORGANIC AND HERBAL TREATMENTS

In addition to the chemical medications, there are a couple of very effective organic and herbal treatments that can be regularly given to finches via drinking water to help reduce their susceptibility to various bacterial and fungal infection possibilities.

Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) is a very useful and inexpensive drinking water additive to use regularly. The purpose of using ACV is to gently acidify the birds' gut, which creates a more hostile environment for harmful bacteria, as they prefer a more alkaline environment in which to proliferate. I dilute it at 5ml ACV per litre of water, and I find that at this strength, it does not deter birds from readily drinking it. I have previously tried offering it at stronger concentrations, but the birds have shown noticeable reluctance to drink it. It may pay to test the pH of your water supply to determine an appropriate dilution.

ACV is by far the most frequently offered additive that I provide to my finches. I routinely offer it at least twice per week in dry weather and every day during wet weather until all dampness has dried out. Once the wet spell has ended and any dampness has dried out, I usually follow up with a Baycox treatment to prevent coccidiosis.

Another useful non-chemical water additive that can be safely incorporated into your regular routine is garlic. Garlic has very useful anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties, so it is very useful in preventing these infections in finches. The easiest and most effective way I have found to offer garlic to my finches is to simply crush a clove or two and wash the crushed garlic and its juice into a watering can with about a litre of warm to hot water. Top up the watering can with cold, fresh water and offer it to the finches as their drinking water. The warmer the water that is used to wash the crushed clove(s), the greater the release of the garlic juice will be. This juice dissolves well into water, whereas commercially available garlic oil or powder can only be efficiently administered via seed or soft food. Some people simply float a cut garlic clove in their birds' water bowl. However, this does not release nearly as much garlic juice into the water as does the crushed garlic and warm water combination. I only offer garlic juice in the water a couple of times per year, but this could safely be given far more regularly. I usually only offer it following a particularly long period of wet weather, where an extra measure on top of the ACV and Baycox may be worthwhile.

HAZARD REDUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

Aviary design and fit-out issues which warrant particular attention include:

1. Great emphasis on providing a warm and dry aviary environment, particularly having a dry floor area without wet patches. Free-draining floor substrates, protective cladding to prevent torrential rain from entering the aviary, positioning the aviary to best utilise the warmest, most sunlit aspect for your location, not overplanting the aviary so that there is too much shade preventing any moisture drying up, and providing raised water vessels to prevent a regular wet patch when bathing occurs, will all help to achieve warmth and dryness.
2. Thoughtful design in separating perching, nesting and feeding areas to prevent fouling of food and providing raised feeding stations or shelves so that most feeding activity occurs away from the aviary floor will help minimise infection possibilities.
3. Covering flight areas prevents wild bird droppings from contaminating the aviary and also eliminates a possible access point for predatory birds or animals.

Maintaining a reasonable standard of hygiene in feeding your birds will significantly contribute to preventing possible sources of disease. Regular cleaning of food bowls, especially where moist or perishable food items are provided, is a necessity. Offering foods in non-porous bowls or receptacles such as stainless steel, glass, or glazed terracotta allows for easy cleaning and makes it more difficult for an unhygienic build-up of food waste and droppings to accumulate near food that is to be eaten.

When feeding green grass seed heads, I always peg them up on the wire at head height and remove and dispose of any that fall to the ground. Similarly, Lebanese cucumber is located in the same area on small wire hooks. The old practice of throwing greens onto the floor of the aviary brings with it a high chance of bacterial, fungal, or parasitic worm infestation.

Winnowing of fouled seed for re-offering back to finches is a serious disease hazard, especially if the seed has been originally offered to the birds in open containers in which birds defecate, the winnowed seed is still likely to contain bird droppings. More economical use can be made of fresh seed in the first place by feeding it in gravity-fed seed hoppers in which fouling of waste seed is minimised by covered spillage trays or just feeding smaller amounts regularly and discarding any leftovers.

A similar infection risk exists with live insects such as mealworms, which breed in the seed husks and other organic waste that accumulates on some aviary floors. If these are offered back to the birds to eat or if they hunt for them by scratching amongst this waste, these insects bred in the fouled waste of the birds that then consume them pose an enormous risk of the birds becoming infested with tapeworm and other internal parasites.

STOCK MANAGEMENT

The most important element of stock management that relates to finch health is the stocking rate. Apart from the enormous contribution to breeding results, a very lightly stocked aviary in which the number of breeding pairs is kept to an absolute minimum and where independent young are removed regularly is the ideal preventative health measure. The most obvious benefit is the drastically reduced incidence of food or water becoming fouled by droppings. The reduced incidence of aggression and direct competition between birds for all of life's necessities results in significantly lower stress levels and significantly better-fed and more content birds. Such individuals are far less likely to succumb to infection than stressed-out, "hen-pecked" birds, which have to battle the masses for their fair share of half-eaten, fouled leftovers or for a gulp of dirty water containing various floaties.

AVIAN VETS

If in doubt about any bird health issue, the best port of call is an avian vet. If your finches are experiencing recurring illnesses and/or deaths, it is then particularly important to consult an avian vet to positively identify the problem and then treat it under the vet's guidance or advice. Paying for an autopsy/faecal examination to get a positive diagnosis of an existing problem can be far less costly than a broader shotgun medication approach to attempt to deal with an unknown disease enemy, which may well still result in further ongoing losses as well as other possible secondary problems arising from the inappropriate, misguided medication of affected birds.

CONCLUSION

Managing the health of a finch collection is all about risk minimisation. Play devil's advocate in considering the possible risks to your birds in how you acquire, feed, house, medicate and manage them. Detailed and commonsense consideration of your methods and routine will help to avoid or at least greatly minimise the most seriously harmful health issues that have the potential to affect your finches.

Orange-breasted Waxbill in a planted aviary

Crimson Finch pair in a sparsely populated breeding aviary

This accomplished finch breeder enjoyed great success by limiting the number of birds per aviary to a maximum of 5-6 pairs

For breeding purposes it is best to limit the number of pairs kept in each aviary

AUTHOR
BRADLEY
R. HOLLAND

Vale
Nick Harris

ON 22 October 2024, we lost another stalwart of the avicultural community, Nick Harris from the Hunter Valley, New South Wales.

I first met Nick at an ABA meeting in 1996 when I lived in Sydney. Nick and I were ABA delegates at the time, for the Hunter Valley Avicultural Society (HVAS) and the Softbill and Native Pigeon Society respectively.

Whilst chatting with Nick at the meeting, he asked if I would attend a HVAS meeting as a guest speaker sometime and said that I'd be most welcome to stay with him. I happily agreed and this was the beginning of my long friendship with Nick.

Nick was a longtime member of the HVAS and a dedicated member of the committee for many years. He held the positions of President, Vice President and Secretary at various points between 1995 to 2008.

Upon my first visit to Nick's place, I was greeted by his then-partner, Robyn, whom he later went on to marry. They shared a love of parrots, breeding and showing poultry and African orchids.

Nick's interests didn't stop there, though. He was also a talented Clay Pigeon shooter and had a keen eye for wildlife art, which led to him building up a nice collection including original works and limited edition prints by world-renowned Australian artist, Rachel Lewis.

During his many years in the hobby, Nick was instrumental in introducing countless youngsters to aviculture. He took every opportunity to promote our hobby and share his love of birds. He always welcomed visitors to his home and loved showing them his collection, and he arranged many aviary visits throughout the Hunter Valley, for myself and many others.

Among his favourite birds were Gang-gang and Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, two species that he was very successful with.

I was able to catch up with Nick last year while attending the HVAS Wings Hunter Valley Avicultural Convention, and I am so thankful that I had this opportunity to spend time with him one last time.

Earlier this year, Nick was admitted to hospital with suspected pneumonia, after his lungs were x-rayed, it was found that he had advanced-stage lung cancer. He requested that he be sent home as he wished to spend the remaining time that he had left surrounded by his family and birds.

Although I couldn't attend his funeral, I have been informed that there was a large turnout, with many from the avicultural community joining his family to pay their last respects to a great friend and passionate supporter of our wonderful hobby. Nick will be sadly missed by many.

Fly high with the birds, Nick. May you rest in peace, my friend.

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ADRIAN BYRNES (NSW)	My Path into Finch Aviculture
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DAVID WHALEY (Victoria)	Beautiful Firetails and Red Crested Finches
DR SIMON GRIFFITH (NSW)	Genetic Studies of Australia Finches
HARRY DOVEN (WA)	Challenges for Finch Aviculture in Western Australia
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DES BOORMAN (Qld)	The Value of Weeds for Your Finches

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AUTHOR

NATHANIEL COEN

BEGINNERS GUIDE TO Budgies

PART I

Wild Budgerigar and chicks at nest entrance
PHOTO BEN PEARCE

INTRODUCTION

The Budgerigar *Melopsittacus Undulatus* is one of the most popular caged birds worldwide. I would say it would take the title of number one parrot, as so many people from right across the Globe started with the humble Budgie as their first bird.

BUDGIES IN THE WILD

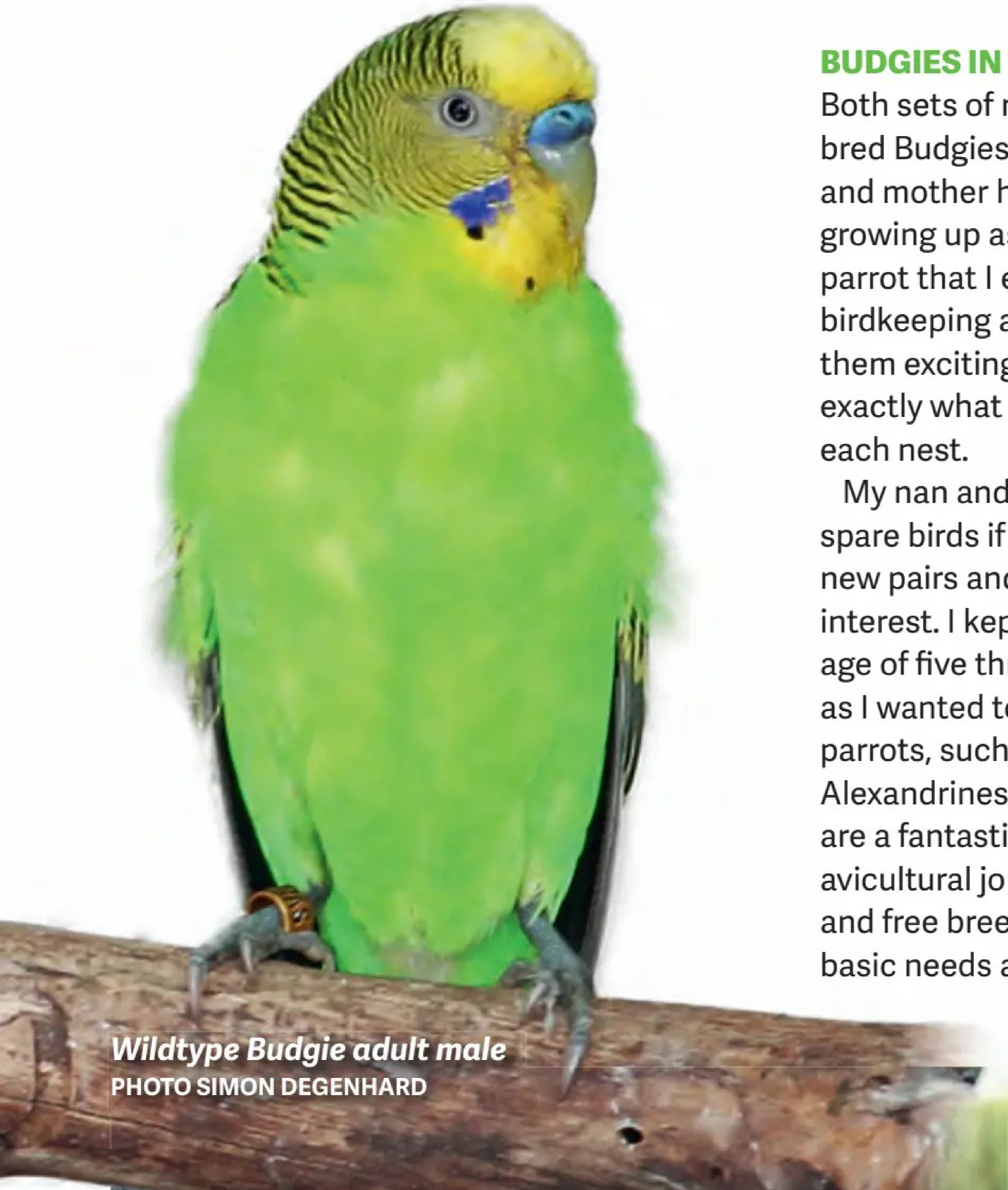
Budgies are native to Australia and are found in a range of habitats including grasslands, arid and semi-arid zones and bushland. Wild Budgies are highly adaptable to a range of conditions. They are never found far from water and are seasonally nomadic, travelling vast distances in search of food.

Budgies are highly social birds that live and feed in flocks. They are known to feed on Australian native grasses, weed seed, saltbush, spinifex grass seed and wattle seed in the wild. Budgies will typically feed on the ground in large groups.

In the wild Budgies will typically pair up and breed during the rainy season, from December to March in the arid regions of Australia. They breed in tree cavities. The hollow or cavity is usually bare of nesting material, and 6-8 eggs are laid. Their breeding cycle is rapid, with incubation lasting around 20 days and fledging occurring approximately 30 days after hatching. During years that an abundance of food and water is available, several clutches will be raised in quick succession, as budgies will nest all year round if conditions are right.

Wildtype Budgies are predominantly green in colour with a yellow face and some yellow present on the wings.

Their conservation status is listed as being of Least Concern.



Wildtype Budgie adult male
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

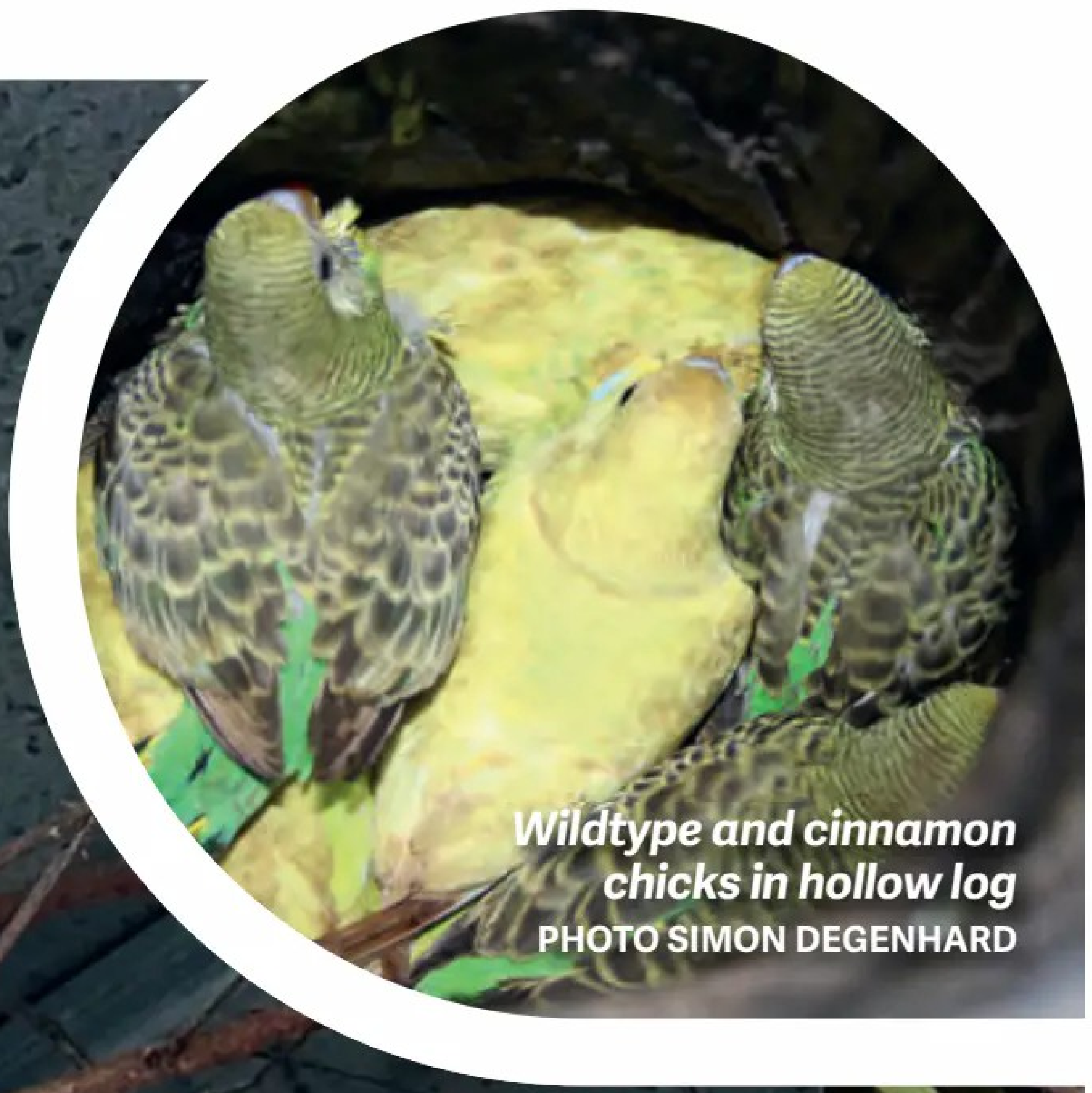
BUDGIES IN THE FAMILY

Both sets of my grandparents kept and bred Budgies over the years, and my father and mother had them when they were growing up as kids. Budgies were the first parrot that I ever kept, introducing me to birdkeeping as a hobby. I found breeding them exciting as I would never know exactly what colours would appear in each nest.

My nan and uncle always gave me their spare birds if I required them to make up new pairs and this helped maintain my interest. I kept and bred Budgies from the age of five through to 14, only stopping as I wanted to pursue breeding Asiatic parrots, such as Indian Ringnecks and Alexandrines. I believe that Budgies are a fantastic bird to commence your avicultural journey with as they are hardy and free breeding, providing that their basic needs are met.

LUCKY; MY FIRST BUDGIE IN 15 YEARS

In May 2024, I took in a young Budgie that had escaped from its previous owner and was attacked by local crows. Luckily for the Budgie, it was saved before any serious injury occurred and escaped with just a few missing feathers. I had not kept Budgies for the past 15 years until I was given this bird by the person who saved it, as they could not look after it due to them having cats in their home. I had looked after this Budgie for a few weeks and was unsure if I wanted to get back into breeding and keeping them again. I had a spare aviary that was supposed to be reserved as a holding aviary, however, in the three years of having it, I had only used it for a total of 15 weeks. I became attached to this little Budgie and was reminded of the joy that I derived from keeping these little Aussie gems when I was a child. I decided to keep it and acquire some others to set up a small colony.



Wildtype and cinnamon chicks in hollow log
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

The author's colony of Budgies

18+

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SETTING THE HOLDING AVIARY UP FOR THE NEW ARRIVALS

If installing a new aviary, it is important to consider its placement, as it should face away from the direction of most storms and strong winds. Ideally, in Australia, aviaries should face North to maximise the birds' access to the sun during winter and to avoid the harsh afternoon sun in summer.

Another thing to consider is the floor of the aviary; what will the substrate be? How are you going to prevent vermin from entering the aviary? And how will you keep it clean?

I considered this in the past and I have used both concrete slabs and pavers as the base, with a layer of sand on top to allow the floor to be easily raked and kept clean. I now use timber sleepers to sit the aviary on, this extends the life of the galvanised tubing when compared to it sitting directly on the ground. Inside the aviary, I install a layer of snake and mouse proof wire to prevent mice or rats from digging up into the aviary. I then use a mix of crusher dust and concrete to make a slab over the top of this mesh. This has worked for me so far, as no vermin has entered the aviary. I still add a layer of sand on top to make the floor easier to keep clean.

If the aviary is new, it is also important to wash the mesh down with a white vinegar and water solution containing approximately one cup of vinegar to one bucket of water. This is done to remove any excess chemicals left on the wire during the galvanisation process.

I skipped these steps this time as I was using an existing aviary. I did, however, clean the aviary, and all feed and water containers with disinfectant before releasing the Budgies.

I also added all new perches of varying sizes. I like to use natural timber branches from various species such as Eucalyptus, Callistemon, Banksia, and Grevillea. Having branches with different textured bark and diameters will help with the foot health of captive parrots, by providing exercise and naturally wearing their nails down.

SEXING BUDGIES 101

I had difficulty telling the sex of Lucky, the original Budgie that I had. I thought that because I saw blue on the cere, it meant that Lucky was a young male, so I purchased two females and a male to make two pairs. I did show a photo to the breeder I bought the other Budgies from, and they thought Lucky was a hen. I ended up doing a DNA test as Lucky is a pied Budgie and I was unsure, and it turned out that the breeder was correct, Lucky is a hen. However, I learnt later that Budgies can be visually sexed at a young age.

To sex a Budgie, you need to look at the cere. The cere is the fleshy part above the beak and there is a colour difference between the two sexes. When Budgies leave the nest females will have a light blue cere and males a light pink cere. As hens age, their ceres will turn a brown/ tan colour and have a crusty appearance when in breeding condition. In males, the cere will turn deep blue in colouration and will remain this colour throughout their life span. There are exceptions to the rule, especially where mutations are concerned, as with some colours such as pied, the ceres of males may not turn blue, but instead, remain pink.

One of the author's Budgies – adult male

PURCHASING STOCK

I no longer purchase stock from pet shops as I prefer to buy directly from other breeders. Birds can be sourced from breeders at bird sales run by local bird clubs or directly from those that advertise their birds online. This time I brought direct from a fellow member of my local bird club and at the annual sale.

Some of the things I look for when purchasing stock include:

- Birds should be active and moving around the cage or aviary.
- Birds should be alert to their surroundings, not sleeping or puffed up in appearance.
- I always ask to hold the bird I want to purchase so that I can feel for the keel bone down the front centre of the bird. If you can't directly feel it that is a good sign, as if they are underweight due to illness you will be able to feel this bone. In which case I would not purchase the bird.
- I also look at their feet and break to make sure they are clean and free of mites.
- The feathers should be clean and not soiled, and they shouldn't be missing a lot of feathers. Sometimes birds could be moulting and may be missing some feathers, but this is a gradual process in most species, and they should not be missing a large patch of feathers in one spot.

If a bird meets all these criteria, I would be happy to purchase it. If the bird is an adult, it is also important to ask its age and whether it has lived inside in a cage or cabinet or outside in an aviary. Birds need to acclimatise to being outside if they have spent all their life inside up to that point. For example, don't release birds directly into an outside aviary in the middle of winter if they are used to being inside, as they need time to gradually get used to the conditions. This can be done by placing the bird/s outside during the day and then bringing them back inside overnight for the first few weeks or months.

Also, if you arrive home with new birds late in the day, then it is best to wait until the following morning to release them, as it is advisable to allow them at least 8 hours of daylight to get used to their new surroundings before nightfall.

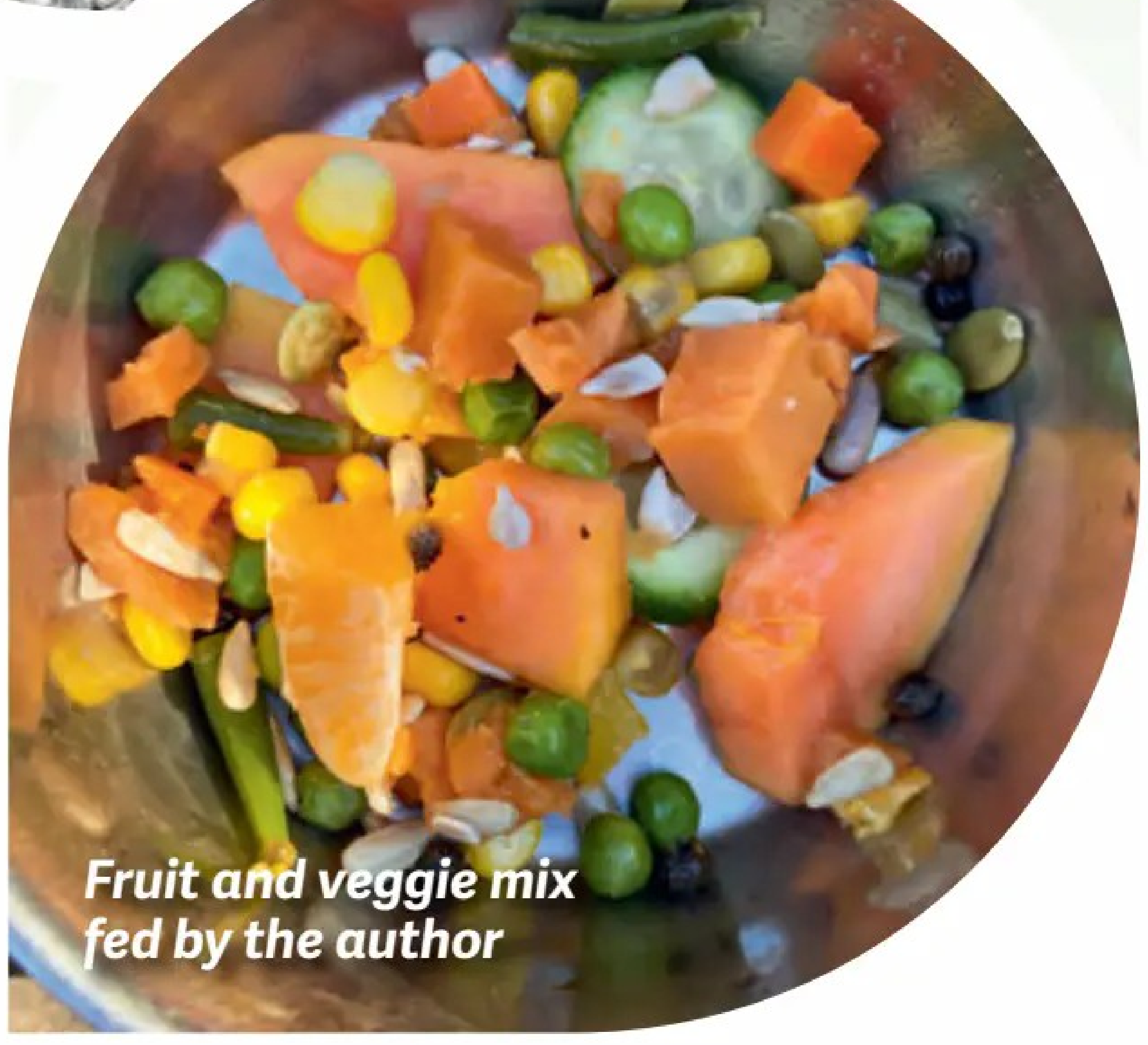
Two of the author's Budgies

One of the author's Budgies – adult female

Juvenile yellow-faced blue
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

Yellow-faced blue with chicks
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

Yellow-faced blue chicks in hollow log
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD



Fruit and veggie mix fed by the author

Yellow-faced blue adult female
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

DIET

I offer the following seed mix: I combine Avigrain Budgie Green and Avigrain Finch Red at a 50:50 ratio and feed this as the main dry seed component of their diet. Twice a week I also offer seed that has been coated with "The Good Oil" by Passwell in separate containers to provide essential vitamins, minerals, and fats such as Omega 3. I only leave this seed in for a maximum period of 24hrs, to avoid spoilage. Millet sprays are also offered semi-regularly and these are relished.

My birds always have access to Fit Grit from Naturally for Birds. The mix contains Canunda shells, crushed cuttlefish bone, activated charcoal, ionised grit, and baked crushed eggshells. This mix has been great for the birds as it is high in calcium, and they seem to like it as there is very little wastage. I also offer some whole cuttlefish bones to not only supply another source of calcium but also to provide enrichment.

I provide the same fruit and vegetable mix for all my birds whether they are parrots or finches. It consists of spinach, Swiss chard, kale, thawed frozen peas, corn and carrots, capsicum, chilli, cucumber, pumpkin, apple, pawpaw, endive, green beans, pear, oranges, mandarin, and dandelion. I also add tri-coloured quinoa and chia seeds to this mix. And they also receive corn on the cob most days.

Note: only feed dandelions grown on your property or collected from other locations where you can be sure that herbicides have not been used. If you are unsure do not feed them to your birds, as it is better to be safe than sorry. The same goes for native grasses, and it is also advisable not to collect them from roadsides as they are exposed to chemicals from passing vehicles.

I also offer green grass including Kangaroo grass, Poa, and *Pennisetum* species such as fountain grass. Green panic or Guinea grass seed heads are also consumed.

My birds also receive soft food. For this purpose, any commercial egg and biscuit mix is suitable. During the breeding season, I add either Vetafarm or Wombaroo Insectivore Mix to increase the protein level.

CONCLUSION PART I

Budgies are a great addition to any bird collection and provide a lot of joy for their keepers due to both their wonderful personalities and entertaining antics.

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PART II

In part II of this article, I will discuss the mutations that I purchased, their history, breeding expectations, and breeding tips.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN BREEDING Australian Native Birds?

Carnaby's (Short-billed) White-tailed Black Cockatoo adult male
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

AUTHOR
GEORDY WYNNE

My name is Geordy Wynne, I am a 17-year-old aviculturist from rural South Australia. I have kept and bred birds from an early age, learning the skills and techniques from my father, whom I admire greatly. I can fondly remember sitting down with my dad, scrolling through copies of BirdKeeper Magazine, and dreaming of someday submitting an article of my own. This year I have been conducting my year 12 high school Research Project, the topic that I chose centred around the idea that certain factors are related to the successful breeding of Australian native birds.

INTRODUCTION

In aviculture, keepers may spend years perfecting their regimes and methods to achieve successful breeding of their chosen species. There are specific factors that contribute, some more than others, to how successfully Australian native birds can be bred in captivity. This is the case for all species, from parrots to quail, and finches to softbills. Through my research, ten factors were identified as being important to breeding birds in Australia.

They are:

- Diet.
- Hygiene.
- Disease control.
- Watering systems.
- Direction that the aviary faces.
- Rodent control.
- Nest type.
- Aviary design.
- Population density
- Aviary size/space.

Of course, more factors could be added, and you may feel that some of those listed above are not as important as others, but the point of this investigation was to devise which are the most important according to my research. The findings of this research point towards there being three major groups of factors that are the most important when it comes to breeding Australian native birds.

They are:

1. Diet.
2. Population, compatibility, and the amount of space.
3. Hygiene and medication regimes.

DIET

Providing a diet that includes all the vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that birds obtain in their natural diet is key to breeding success. This also encompasses providing certain foods that can trigger the breeding cycle of a species, such as live food, flowering plants (growing in the aviary or branches collected from outside the aviary), high-protein soft food mixtures, etc.

Providing a suitable diet is of foremost importance for all species and can be vital for the successful breeding of parrots, as without an appropriate diet, often their breeding cycle will not be triggered. This is what occurs in the wild, in Spring or after rain, when food is plentiful, their breeding cycle kicks in as they know that they will be able to easily provide enough food to successfully rear their young. This indicates that there are no large parrot species that are overly hard to breed if you provide a suitable environment, diet, compatible mate, and meet various other more species-specific requirements. Still, if one of these factors is not met, then successful breeding will likely not be achieved. However, a few species have very precise requirements, and aviculturists have struggled to breed them.

One such group is the black cockatoos. Whilst Red-tailed Black Cockatoos are the easiest and are commonly bred in captivity, at the other end of the scale, White-tailed Back Cockatoos are the hardest and are much less frequently bred in captivity. They require a significantly more species-specific diet that includes the seeds of particular trees that can be difficult to provide (Welch 2024).

Delving further into this, Swift Parrots, a highly endangered species in the wild, can be successfully bred in captivity in good numbers provided that their dietary needs are met. In the wild, breeding success can be linked to the availability of the flowers of two Eucalypt species, therefore, in captivity, the provision of *Eucalypt* flowers for them to feed on can trigger breeding and increase overall success. In addition to this, they require a varied diet, with breeders having achieved success by offering pelletised fruits, dry and wet lorikeet mixes, small parrot seed mixes, and seasonal fruits. In the wild, insects also play a significant role in their breeding diet. In captivity, breeders have found success in offering mealworms to supplement their diet during the breeding season (Tasmanian Avicultural Society, 2000).

Live food plays a vital role in the natural diet of many Australian birds, especially for many softbills, but also for numerous finches, quails, and some parrots. For many of these species, the provision of live food will kickstart their breeding cycle. Providing a variety of different live food options can be just as important as overall quantity and cultivated and/or commercially available options can include crickets, maggots, and mealworms.

Moths are another great option to offer and can be collected using a simple moth trap, such as one that can be made using a fluorescent globe and a wire box. The live moths can then be released into the aviary, thereby providing the birds with natural enrichment by allowing them to use their natural hunting skills and an additional high-protein food source which can further encourage the birds to breed (Holmes, 2017).

For breeders who are trying to breed birds to a certain standard, i.e. for the show bench, diet also plays a key role in their success. For show Budgie breeders, conditioning the paired birds for breeding cannot be achieved without a suitable diet. A nutritious diet consisting of greens, seeds, soft food, and appropriate supplements and medications is vital to not only encourage breeding but also to produce high-quality young. Similarly, the breeding of Zebra Finches for the show bench is dependent on a good diet that strengthens the parent birds and provides everything required to rear their offspring.

In the lead-up to and during the breeding season, birds expend vast amounts of energy, all of which is derived from their diet, and that needs to be replaced each day. An appropriate mixture of seeds, greens, and vitamin and mineral-rich foods needs to be provided to ensure that the birds are receiving the vital nutrients they require (Anchor 2024; Wynne 2024).

POPULATION/SPACE/COMPATIBILITY

These three factors are very interchangeable, and often breeders believe the larger the area provided the better, however, for some species better results are achieved in smaller enclosures. Compatibility also plays a key role, especially when breeding for particular traits, if a pair is not compatible, then successful breeding is highly unlikely. Similarly, in mixed-species aviaries, overall compatibility is also particularly important, some quieter species may not breed if there is competition for nesting sites and food, whilst more boisterous species will sometimes actively push other birds away from nest sites.

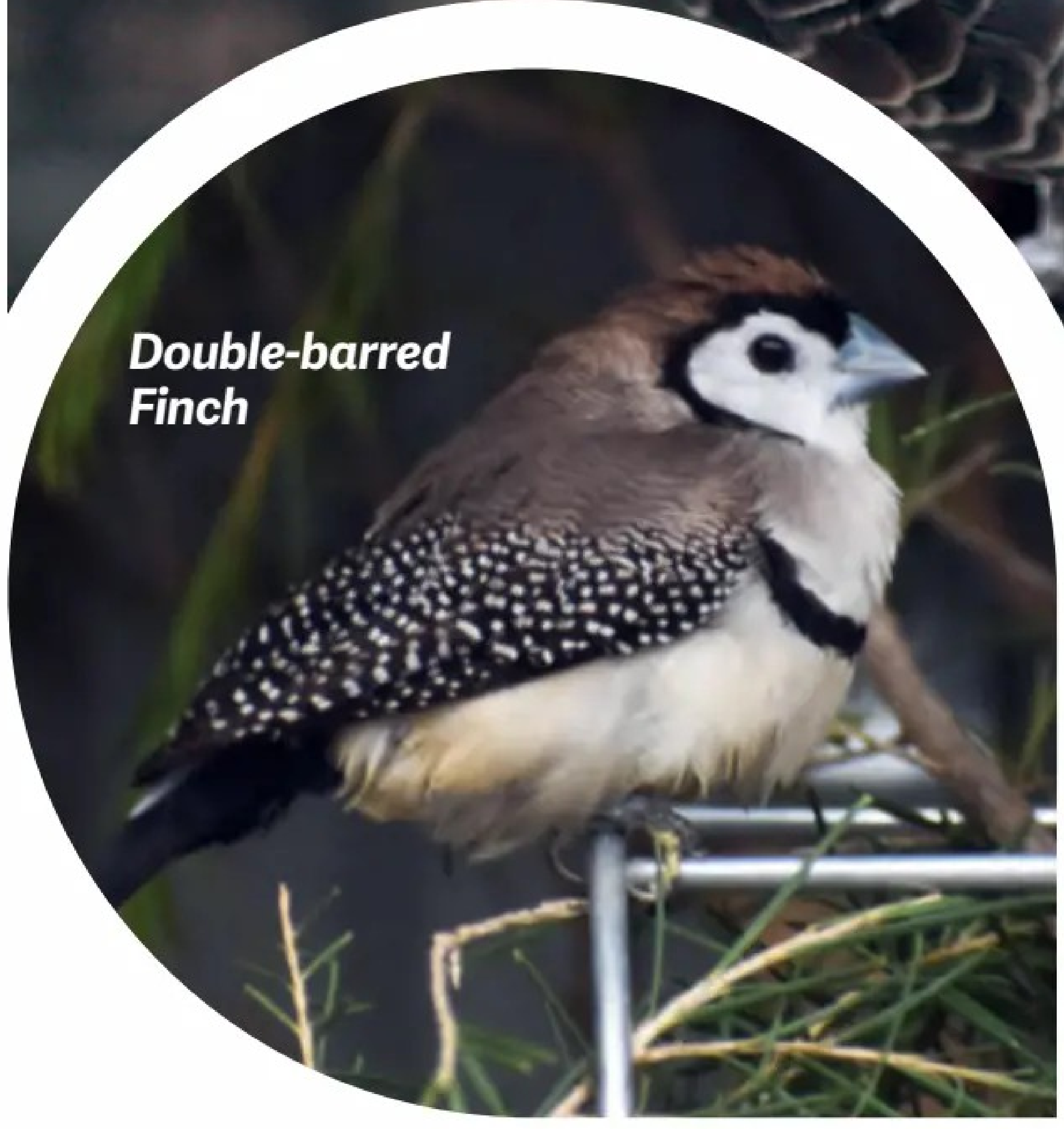
Providing sufficient space is also of significant importance for parrots as all birds require enough room to exercise to help prevent them from becoming overweight and developing other related health issues. Offering more space can also reduce stress when birds are kept in same-species colonies. However, conversely, too much space can also present negative impacts, especially concerning the length of aviaries used to house members of the Australian broad-tailed parrots. When newly fledged, young broad-tails such as Rosellas are known to be flighty and easily spooked, as a result, they will fly at speed and can easily collide with the wire, often resulting in them breaking their necks if the aviary is long enough for them to build up sufficient speed.

Whether being kept in a colony or single pairs, compatibility is particularly important to achieve breeding success with Australian parrots. If pairs do not get along, then the chances of them producing fertile eggs and successfully rearing chicks are very slim (Bradley 2024; Welch 2024).

The factors of population and space must also not be ignored, especially in mixed-species aviaries. Peaceful harmony can be achieved more easily by installing multiple feeding stations and multiple desirable nesting sites. This prevents more aggressive birds from dominating the feeding and nesting sites. The 'less is best' approach is generally the way to go, particularly if breeding is the goal. Many species, for example, Pictorella Mannikins and Red-browed Firetails, require more secluded and lightly stocked aviaries for success to be achieved. When setting up a colony, it is advisable to go with a minimum of three pairs, as housing only two pairs together can be problematic, as it is easier for a single bird to dominate. Again, too many pairs will also present unwanted issues, so always be mindful of how much space is available to the birds. It is also important to know the general compatibility and needs of each species you plan to keep. For example, Masked Finches and Black-throated Finches are lazy nest builders and will take over the nests of other birds, if the opportunity presents (Pace 2024).

Baudin's (Long-billed) White-tailed Black Cockatoo adult female
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

Red-vented Bluebonnets



Double-barred Finch

Bourke's Parrot

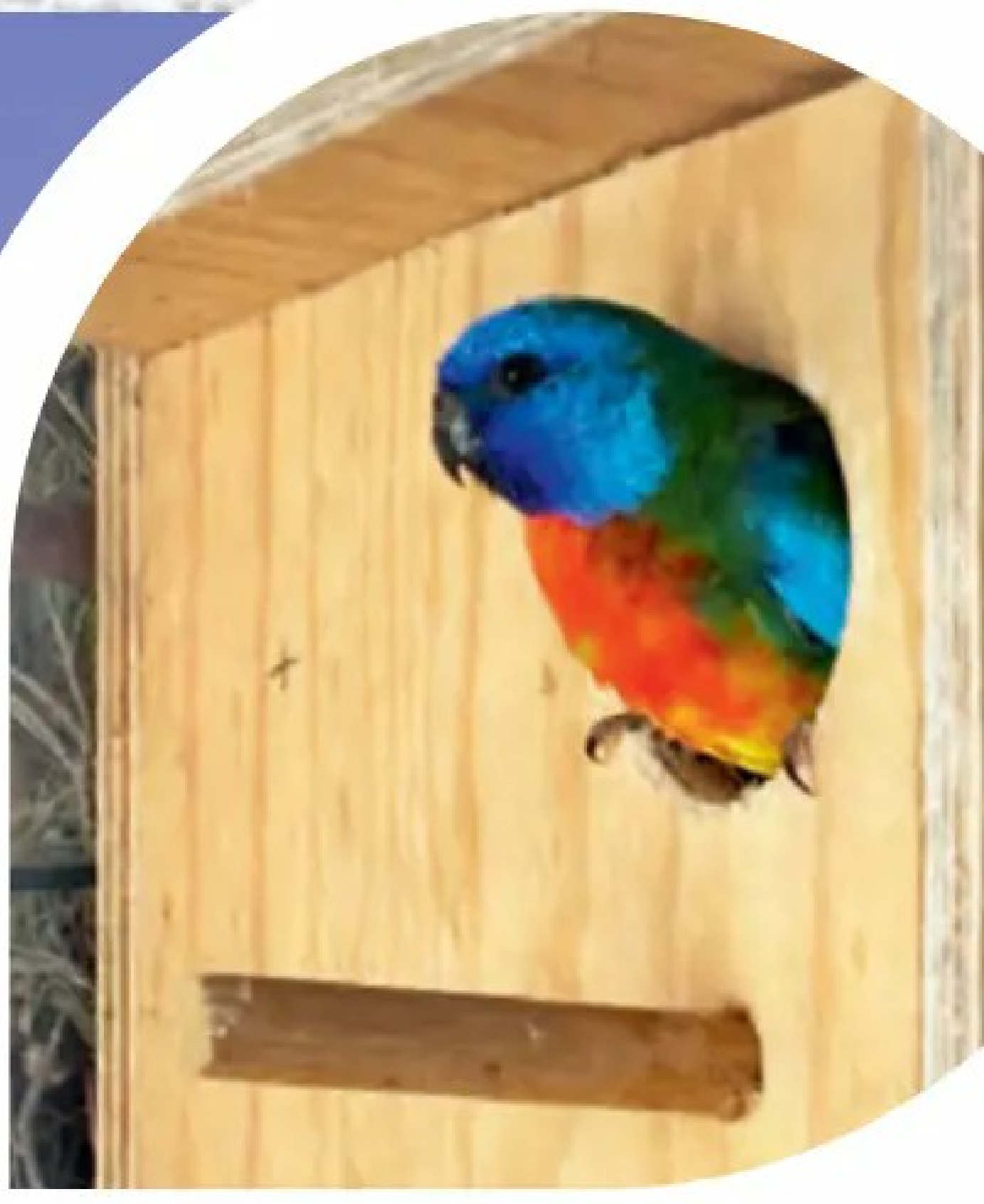
Red-tailed Black Cockatoos Calyptorhynchus banksii naso
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

Peaceful Dove

Diamond Firetails and a Red-fronted Yellow Turquoise Parrot

Wild Zebra Finch
PHOTO GLENN ROMAN

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

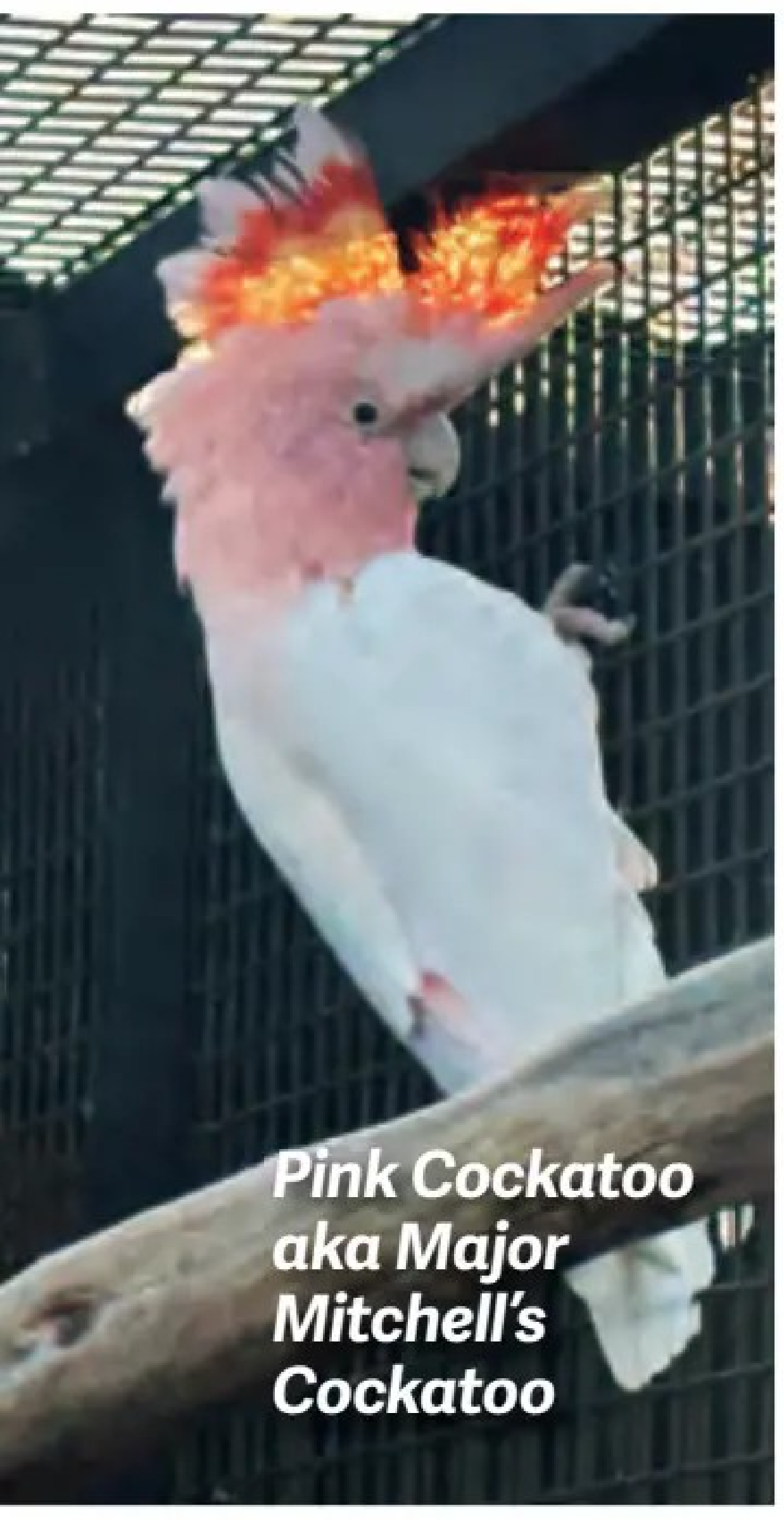

Scarlet-chested Parrot

Scarlet-chested Parrots – hen and babies

Yellow-billed Long-tailed Finches

Mulga Parrot hen

Cloncurry Parrots


Pink Cockatoo aka Major Mitchell's Cockatoo

Budgies

For softbills, the size of the aviary is even more relevant in terms of how many birds can safely be housed together. Particular attention needs to be paid to the individual species, as whilst many softbills can be kept in mixed aviaries with other species, they can be extremely aggressive towards their own species. For example, only one pair of fairy-wrens should be kept per aviary, as they are very territorial and a high level of aggression will be encountered should multiple pairs be housed together, resulting in injuries and even death.

Some species should not even be housed in adjoining aviaries due to their aggressive natures, as they will try to attack each other through the wire. Whilst, with some other species, breeding success is almost entirely dependent on multiple pairs of the same species being housed together. African weavers are a prime example of this, they are a communal species and competition between rival males is required to bring them into full breeding condition. It can be deduced from the above that choosing the species that you wish to keep before building the aviaries so that appropriate design features can be incorporated, will greatly contribute to the level of breeding success that will be achieved (Bradley 2024; Holmes 2017).

Regarding birds bred for the show bench, compatibility is even more important, as not only do the birds need to be compatible from a breeding point of view, but also in terms of genetics, so that desirable traits are passed on. Genetics go a long way to determining size, colour, and markings; choosing the right birds to pair together is imperative.

Cage size can also be the difference between whether breeding success is achieved or not. If housing multiple pairs together it is important to install ample perches and nesting sites, to minimise competition. Housing more pairs together than there are nesting sites available is a sure way to limit success and cause aggression. In the wild, many species will cohabitate peacefully, however, they have the space and freedom to escape from dominant birds, and the same opportunities should be afforded to the birds held in our aviaries (Anchor 2024; Wynne 2024).

HYGIENE AND DISEASE CONTROL

Hygiene and disease control are also key factors, and one cannot be achieved without the other. Regularly cleaning food and water bowls is vital as they can harbour harmful pathogens that can infect birds and quickly spread. It is also good practice to remove all disposable nests and clean nest boxes and perches before the next breeding season. Cleaning nest boxes and nesting areas and replacing brush after each breeding season is vital, as faeces build up in these areas, especially after several clutches have been raised.

Along with good hygiene, a strict parasite control regime needs to be adhered to. However, it is also important to not over-medicate birds as this can lead to infertility and weakness in their young, making them more susceptible in general (Pace, 2024; Wynne 2024; Bradley 2024).

In mixed-species and colony aviaries, the general health of birds is incredibly important as disease can spread quickly amongst the inhabitants. Controlling internal parasites is imperative and as such regular worming is a must. An easy worming routine to stick to is to treat the birds every quarter using a suitable wormer that is administered via their drinking water. This can be done on the first three days of each new season – Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring. One of the best wormers available in Australia is Moxidectin Plus, which is easily administered via the drinking water. As well as treating your existing flock, all new birds should be quarantined and treated for worms, before being introduced to your other birds (Pace, 2024).

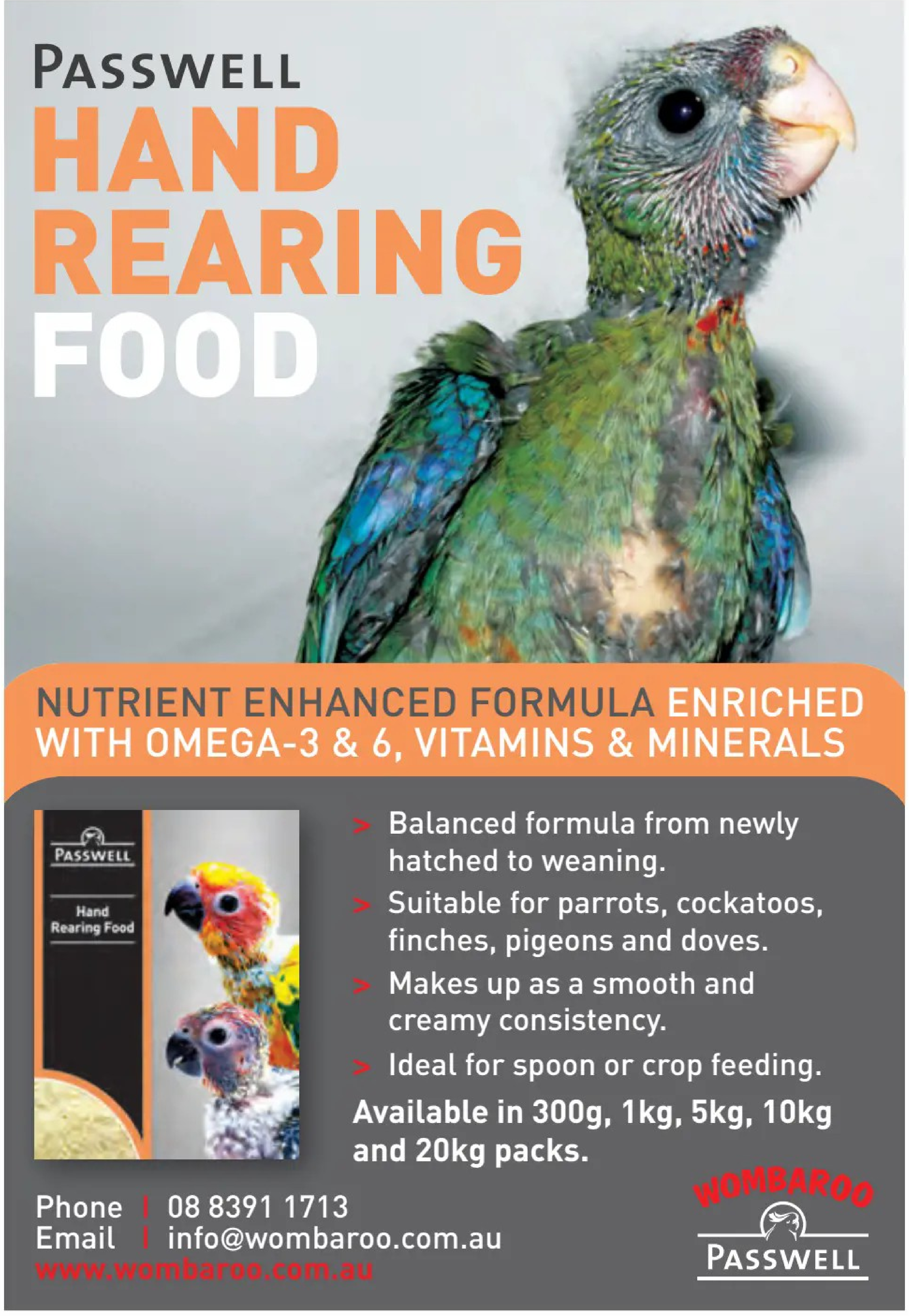
Both prevention and control of disease outbreaks are important factors, and good hygiene practices can decrease the chances of disease. Many diseases are spread via droppings and contaminated food and water, this is why cleanliness and overall good hygiene are of such immense importance. The easiest way to keep food containers and feeding stations clean is to have two sets of bowls per aviary and to swap them out each day. The feeding stations should be cleaned weekly and any build-up of husks and general waste in the aviary should be removed at the same time as if left to accumulate further, disease issues are likely to occur, and rodents and other pests will be attracted to the aviary (Australian Finch Society – UK 2011; Pace 2024).

Rodent proofing is also imperative, as once rodents have gained access to your aviaries it can be all but impossible to eradicate them. The installation of 6mm mouse-proof mesh across the entire aviary floor, all external walls and the roof, or deep, solid footings of at least 800mm around the perimeter of the aviary in addition to mouse-proof mesh on the walls and roof, or a concrete slab floor with a raised rat wall are the most effective ways to prevent access to rodents and other pests. Keeping rodents out is the key, as they can harbour and spread diseases and parasites through direct contact and via their faeces and urine. They can also cause nighttime disturbances and raid nests of eggs and young, further reducing the chance of successful breeding. Rodent infestations will spoil the experience of keeping and breeding birds (Pace 2024; Fitzgerald 2009).

More factors could be added to those mentioned above, including some that you may feel are equally or even more important. Nevertheless, these are the factors that were shown to be the most important as a result of my research project. Having said this, focusing solely on these factors will not guarantee success. In addition to these, the undertaking of your own research, careful observation of your birds, and willingness to try new approaches are all likely to further increase your chances of success. However, my research has shown that success is unlikely to be achieved to any great degree if these factors are not adhered to.

Turquoise Parrot hen and chicks
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARDT

Wild Swift Parrot
PHOTO GLENN ROMAN



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Bush Stone-curlews

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AUTHOR & PHOTOS
STEVE SASS

Bush Stone-curlews are very intriguing birds

INTRODUCTION

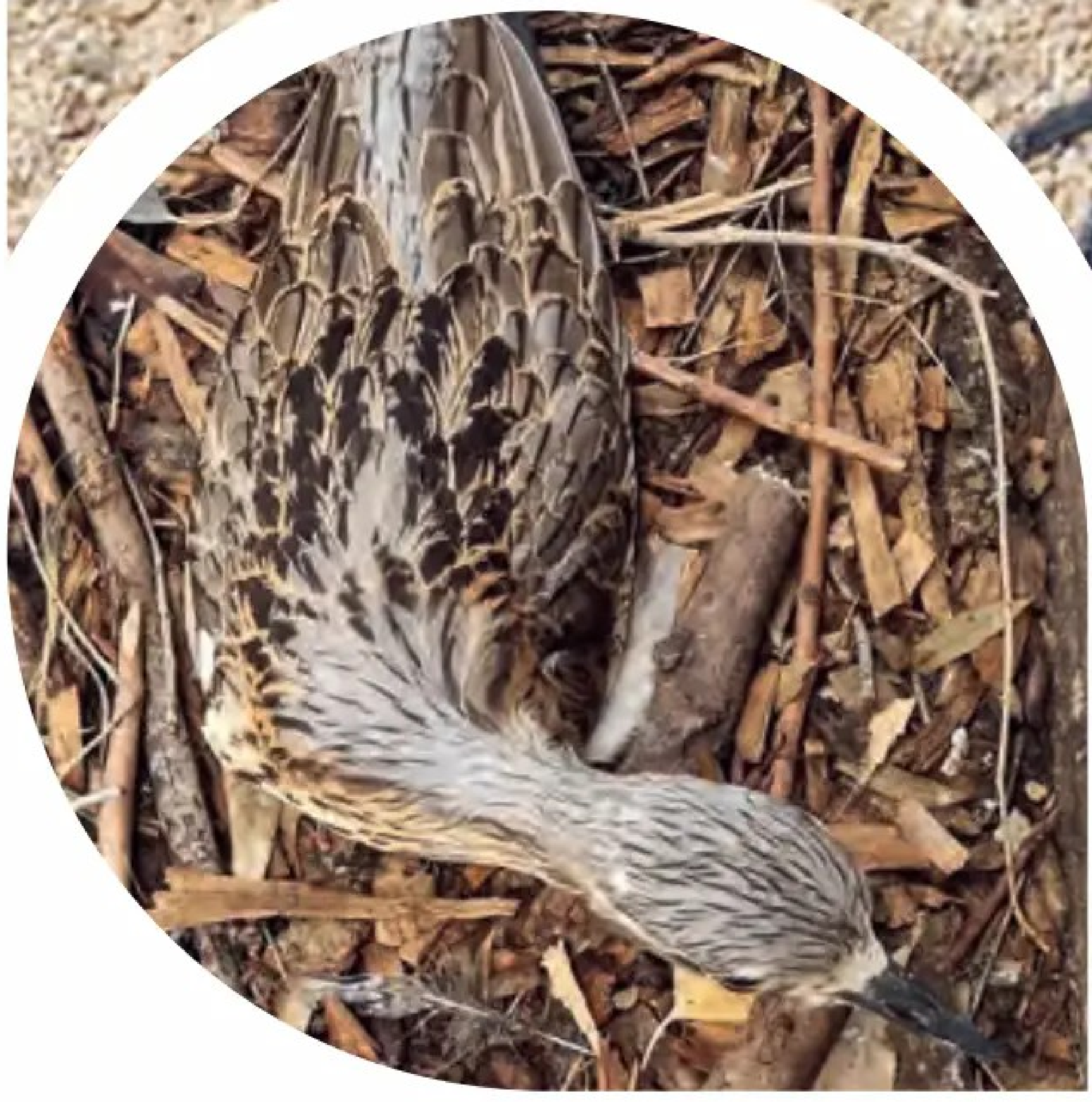
The Bush Stone-curlew is one of my all-time favourite softbills. They are big, bold, full of personality and ooze charisma. They won't be for everyone, but if you can spare the space, the Bush Stone-curlew won't disappoint you and they are an excellent bird with which to commence your journey into the world of softbills.

WHAT IS A BUSH STONE-CURLEW?

The Bush Stone-curlew *Burhinus grallarius*, also known as the Bush Thick-knee (due to the enlarged tibiotarsal joint of the leg), Southern Stone Curlew, Southern Stone Plover, Weeloo or Willaroo, is an upright, ground-dwelling species that stands about 55-60cm tall. Their loud, wailing calls are one of the most characteristic sounds that can be heard in the night. They are the perfect camouflage experts displaying suitable feather colours and patterns and behavioural strategies to avoid detection from aerial predators.

The Bush Stone-curlew was once common across the woodland and open grassland regions of Australia. However, since European settlement and the subsequent loss of habitats and the introduction of feral herbivores and predators, the species has suffered significantly throughout their range. By 1900, Bush Stone-curlews had become extinct in Tasmania and the species is now rare to locally extinct in south-eastern, eastern and western regions of Australia. However, they remain common in some parts of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

They can be found in lightly timbered, open forests and woodlands, as well as dry open grasslands, occasionally beaches, but also in parks and gardens in cities and towns (including the major capital cities of Brisbane and Darwin).



A Bush Stone-curlew pictured from above demonstrates their exceptional camouflage abilities.
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

Bush Stone-curlew front on

Bush Stone-curlew head study

Bush Stone-curlews sharing a very large, sparsely planted aviary

They are a nocturnal bird that feeds mostly on invertebrates including insects, spiders and snails but they will also eat frogs, reptiles and small mammals if the opportunity presents. They are opportunistic feeders, and despite their largely nocturnal nature, they will also sometimes forage during daylight hours.

AVIARY DESIGN

As a larger avicultural species, I would recommend that an aviary for a single pair of Bush Stone-curlews should be no smaller than 5m x 4m (or 20 square metres). However, you will often see the species in large walk-in aviaries in zoos and wildlife parks, so larger areas are also suitable. They are generally not a species that is easily spooked but even when they do fly, it is slow and clumsy.

The key to success with this species is to have an aviary with minimal ground vegetation. It should resemble their woodland habitats with grasses no taller than 30 cm, and fallen logs scattered in some areas. This allows the birds to feel safe, as they must have excellent ground-level vision for the detection of threats and is an absolute necessity for successful breeding. When threatened, Bush Stone-curlews will lay almost completely flat and motionless at ground level to avoid detection. They rely on their feather pattern and colour as an excellent form of camouflage, enabling them to resemble a log on the ground.

Bush Stone-curlews love to bathe, and if the opportunity for a large shallow dish, or small shallow pond is available, your curlews will use this on an almost daily basis.

THE BUSH STONE-CURLEW AS AN AVIARY OCCUPANT

Bush Stone-curlews are relatively placid birds that can be housed with a variety of other species. However, it should not be forgotten that they do eat other animals in the wild, so careful consideration needs to be given as to the choice of fellow aviary occupants. It is also worth keeping in mind that being a terrestrial species, they spend most of their time on the ground.

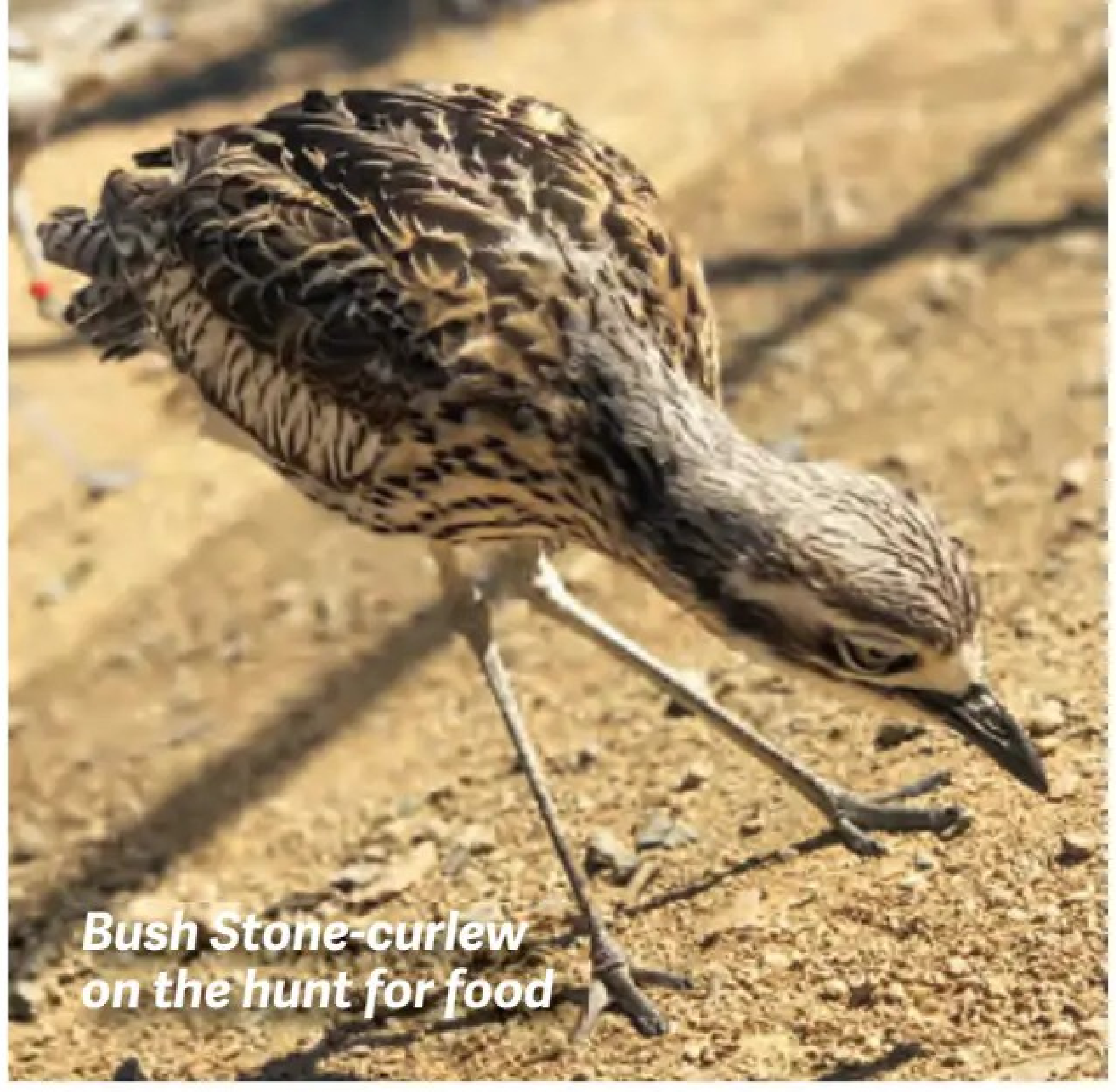
With these considerations, species such as parrots, pigeons, and bowerbirds are well suited to share an aviary with Bush Stone-curlews. However, I have also kept them with finches very successfully, and the key to this is to provide dense thickets of vegetation at ground level that the curlews can't access, and within which recently fledged finches can hide. This minimises the risk of predation by the curlews, as they have been observed eating healthy fledgling finches and even adult finches when the opportunity arises.

They should be kept as a single pair per aviary as they can be highly territorial, attacking perceived intruders. Should multiple birds be housed in a single aviary, it needs to be of sufficient size and have areas where birds can move freely away from dominant individuals.

A Bush Stone-curlew pictured with a newly hatched chick

When feeling threatened, Bush Stone-curlews will lie motionless on the ground

A young Bush Stone-curlew


Bush Stone-curlew on the hunt for food

DIET

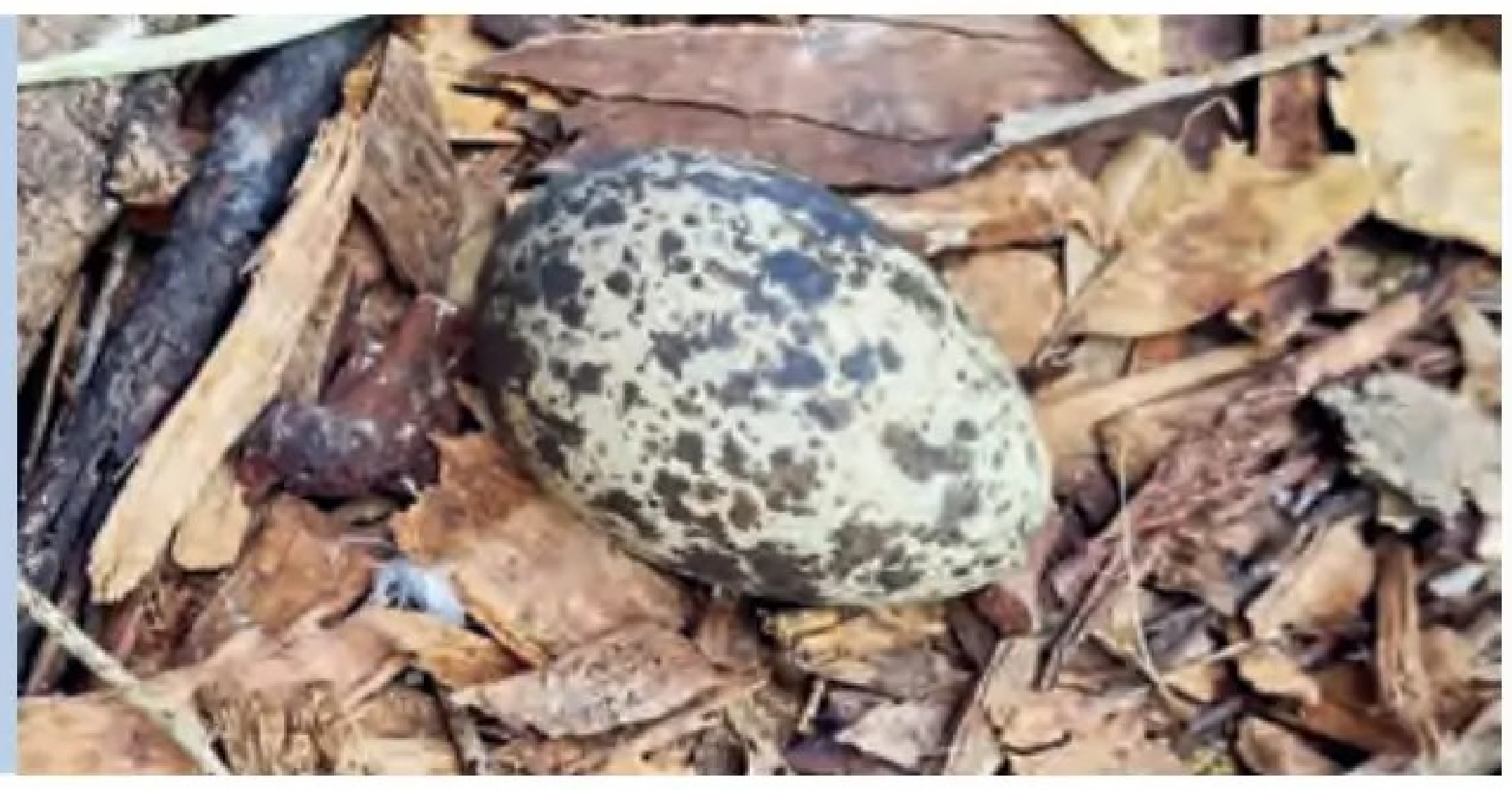
As Bush Stone-curlews will freely feed on a variety of items, they are relatively easy to cater for in captivity. We offer an all-round softbill mix comprising of Kangaroo mince (as a nice lean option free of preservatives) mixed with Passwell Insectivore mix, Chicken starter crumbles, grated cheese, mashed boiled egg and a range of other ingredients. This is made weekly and frozen in daily quantities that are then placed in the fridge the day before feeding out. It is offered to the birds on a tray at ground level.

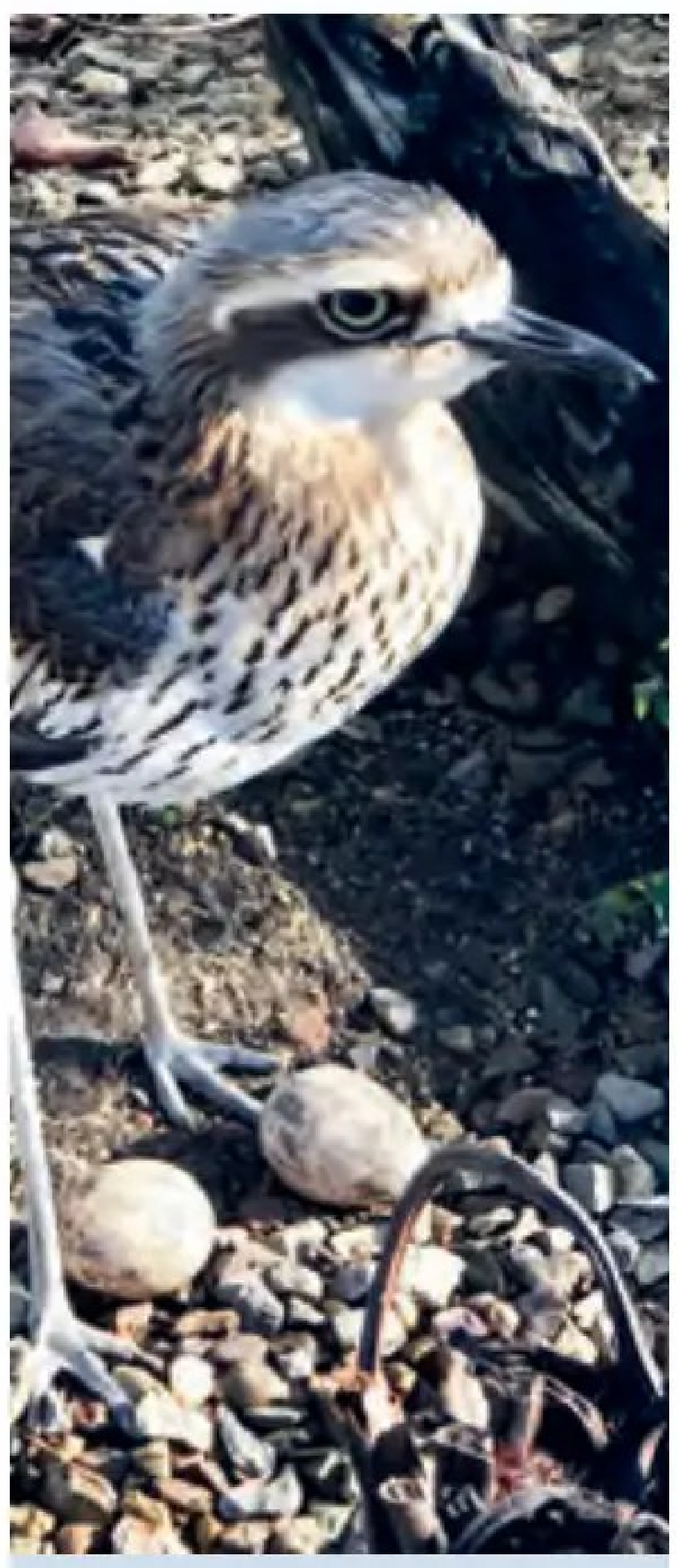
We also offer a range of live food which the birds enjoy but you can also use these food items to encourage breeding. We offer mealworms and super worms, maggots, earthworms and cockroaches. When they are breeding, just prior to the eggs hatching, we increase the amount of live food fed so that the parents can begin to teach the chicks how to forage from day one. We also offer thawed pinky mice to the parents each day from the day of hatching. These are coated in calcium powder and insectivore mix and the adult birds will offer these intently to the recently hatched chicks.

A Bush Stone-curlew and Budgies eating the author's softbill soft food mix

STEVE'S SOFTBILL MIX

- 1kg Kangaroo mince
- 250g grated cheese
- 1 cup of Wombaroo Insectivore Mix
- 250g Chicken starter crumbles (not Turkey crumbles)
- 12 mashed boiled eggs


A Bush Stone-curlew egg
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD


Bush Stone-curlews generally lay two eggs

A nesting Bush Stone-curlew sitting tight
PHOTO SIMON DEGENHARD

BREEDING AND COMPATIBILITY

As is the case with most species, we have always found that good compatibility between pairs significantly increases breeding success. However, we have never had a pair of birds not breed because of incompatibility; they have just taken longer to start. In temperate Australia, a compatible pair will breed at almost any time of the year, however, we have had newly introduced pairs take up to 18 months before they commence breeding.

The sexing of Bush Stone-curlews can only be done accurately via DNA, x-ray or surgical sexing. I have attempted to sex birds using visual techniques based on markings, size and behaviour, but I generally find these methods unreliable. I have used DNA sexing with great success and find it highly accurate and as a non-invasive method, it's perfectly suited to Bush Stone-curlews.

As with other long-lived species, Bush Stone-curlews (who can live for 30+ years) will mate for life if given the opportunity and mature, bonded pairs are usually very successful breeders.

VOCALISATIONS

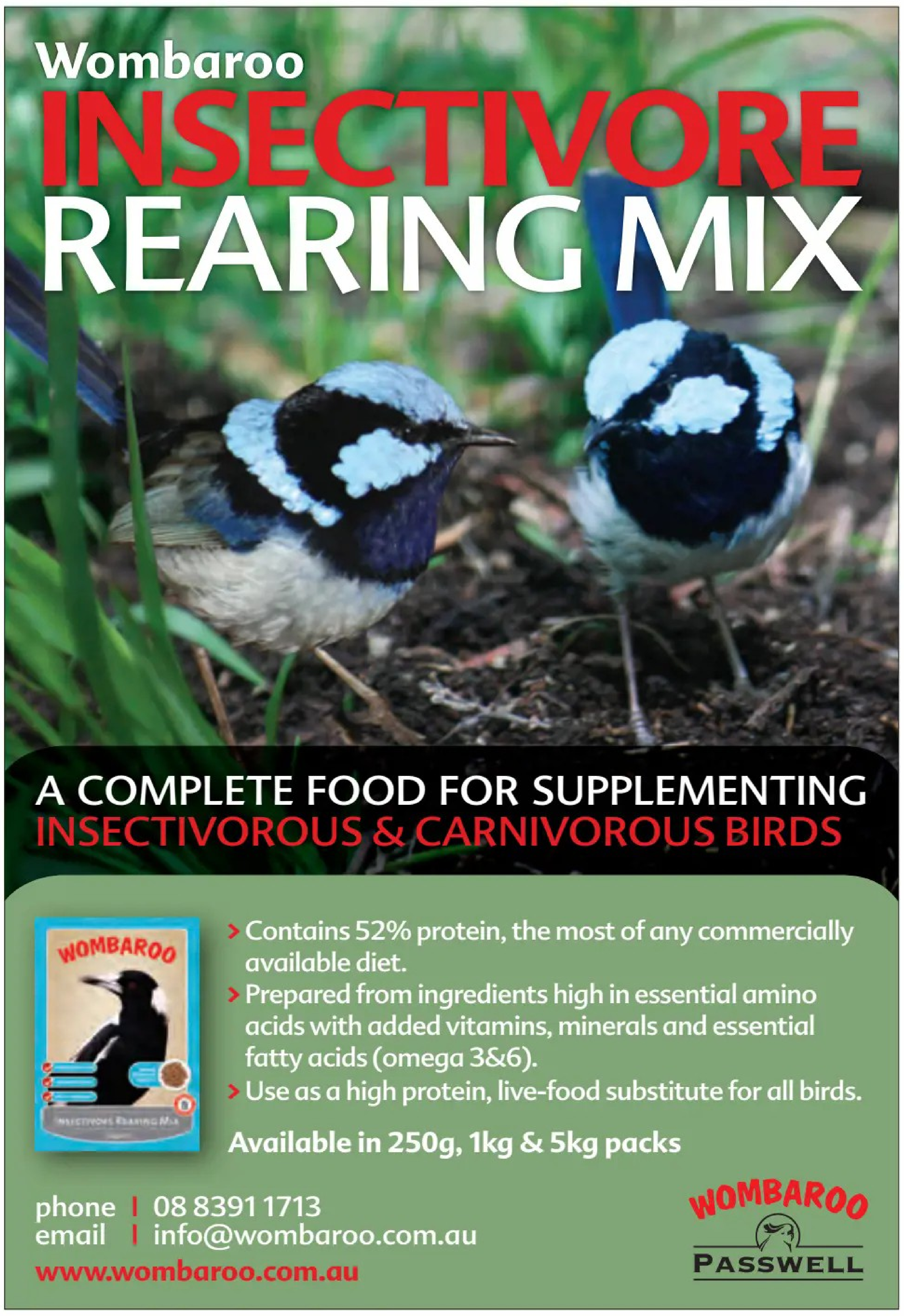
Bush Stone-curlews are very vocal. If you've never heard one before, I highly recommend you do a simple search of the internet to hear these birds calling before you acquire any.

Whilst their calls are often made during the day, they are most prevalent at dusk and into the evening and if you live in a residential area, they may not be what your family or neighbours expect to be hearing at night. But, in saying that, I have kept them in a residential area before and my immediate neighbours loved hearing them! It was an awesome way to share my hobby, but with one of those neighbours moving away, the next ones were not quite so excited when they first heard them.

ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING SPECIES THAT I HAVE KEPT

I first saw Bush Stone-curlews in captivity at Featherdale Wildlife Park when I was in primary school. I immediately fell in love! Those big eyes, their curious movements around the aviary, and that mournful cry of a call. I knew from that very day that I would have this species in my avicultural collection at some stage. They will reward you every day with their wonderful characteristics.

If you are intrigued by what you have read here, then give them a go, you won't regret it! abk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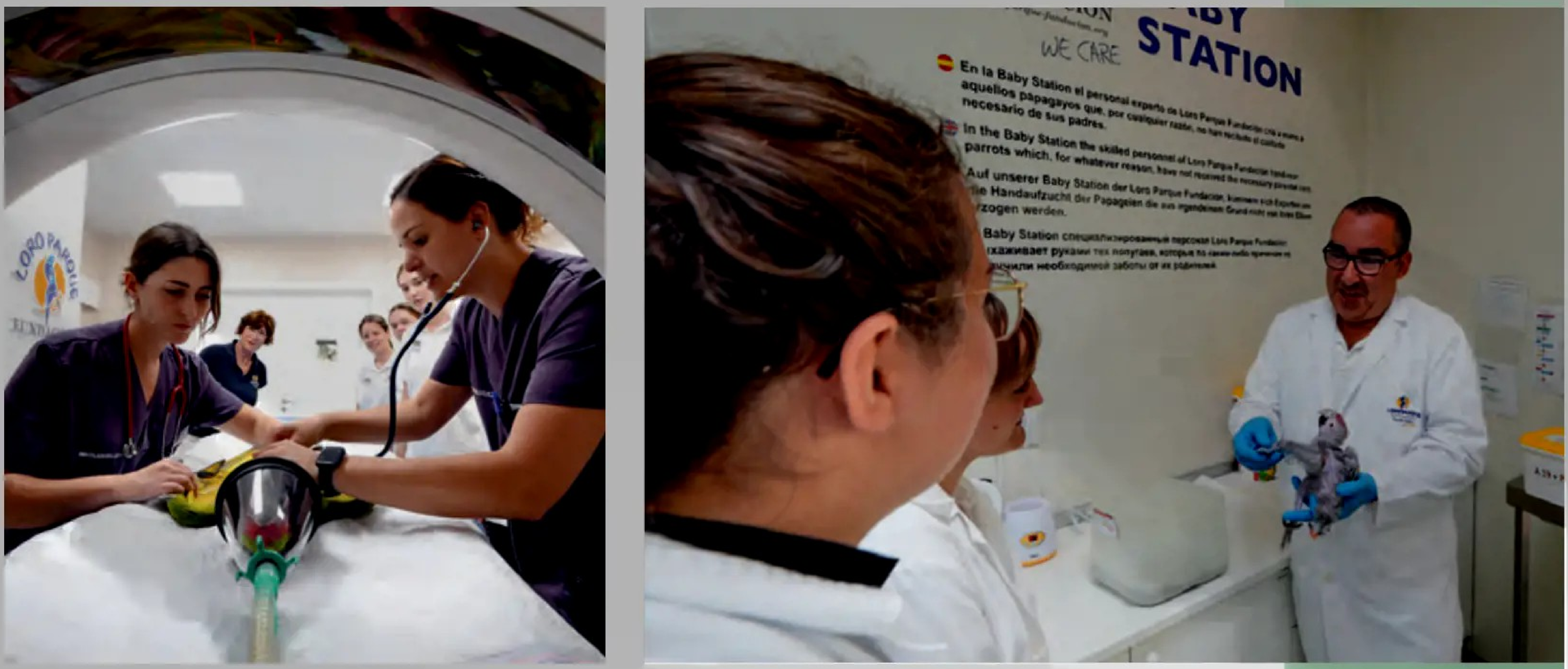


Students from the University of Giessen druing their recent training at Loro Parque

SUCCESS WITH LEAR'S AT LPF

Four more Lear's Macaws have hatched at Loro Parque Fundación (LPF) and as always it is a source of joy to see new chicks of such conservation value. This brings the number of Lear's chicks hatched at LPF since 2007 to 49. Of these, 22 have been sent to Brazil, 8 have been successfully introduced into the wild, and as a result, four chicks have already hatched in the wild. Over 50 Lear's Macaws have come into the world via Loro Parque Fundación thanks to this breeding and reintroduction programme. An effective conservation strategy in which the combination of ex-situ and in-situ work is key.

VET STUDENTS RECEIVE TRAINING AT LORO PARQUE

Recently, we received 20 students from the University of Giessen, Germany. Every year students close to finishing their studies as veterinary medicine professionals come to the Animal Embassy of Loro Parque to receive advanced theoretical and practical training.

The students, who come together with Professor Michael Lierz from this German University, have the opportunity to receive a week of theoretical training, where they learn about clinical diagnostics, applied and preventive medicine, animal welfare, reproduction of endangered species, conservation projects in the environment and concepts such as evolutionary ones, which can be very well appreciated in the ecosystems of the Canary Islands. In the second week, they do practical work in the different animal departments, in order to understand the principles of hygiene, handling, nutrition and animal care.

One of the most interesting parts of this partnership comes at the end of their time with us, when these future professionals explain what they have learned from our team. They invariably tell us how important it is to understand the daily management of the animals from a clinical point of view. They realise that diet, enrichment and welfare are a set of parameters that they must maintain at a clinical level. A complex task as each patient that may arrive at a clinic comes from a very different environment.

This acquired understanding, which is achieved through the practical training days at Loro Parque, results in exceptional veterinarians who can specialise in psittacine and exotic animals in the future. More than 600 students have passed through our facilities over the past 30 years and many of them are now important doctors in the animal world in different corners of the planet.

This educational programme coincides with a resting period for many parrot species, which have completed their annual breeding phase. The tasks set out for our keepers consist of reconditioning the aviaries, sanitising nests, changing enrichment elements, and preparing the season's juveniles for flight exercises to reach their full growth potential. abk

AUTHOR
RAFAEL ZAMORA PADRÓN
Scientific Director
Loro Parque Fundación

Márcia Weinzettl, LPF Bird Curator with the four Lear's Macaws that hatched in 2024

AUTHOR
MEHD HALAOUATE

THE HUNT FOR

Wild Shining Parrots

PART I

INTRODUCTION

I have always been fascinated by the Shining Parrot family and my longing to see them in the wild has been present in my everyday life for a long time. Even in captivity, this family seems to be very rare. It can be said that seeing them in the wild in their natural habitat sat at the top of my bucket list of species that I wished to see before leaving this planet. This longing intensified even further when I saw the film "Robinson Crusoe" starring Pierce Brosnan, in which a tame Shining Parrot was featured as a pet.

A DESERVED VACATION

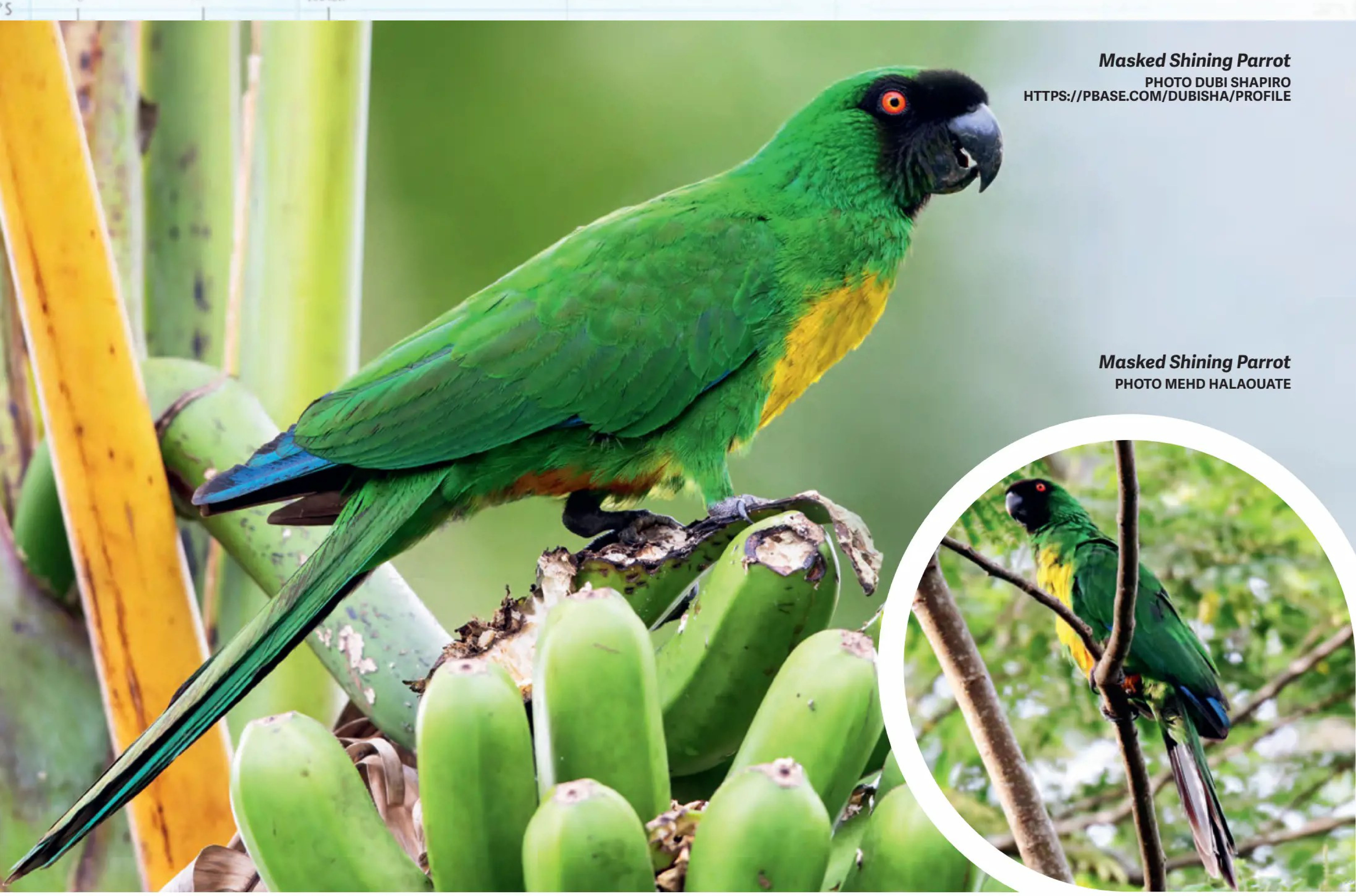
For almost 13 years we, ***Birding Indonesia***, have been arranging and leading birdwatching trips within Indonesia, especially to Papua (Irian Jaya) to experience the amazing displays of the different species of Birds-of-paradise. This is a very demanding job that involves some extreme trekking, at times through slippery, muddy and steep trails, infested with mosquitoes but also some wonderful walks on some amazing paradise-like islands with beautiful sandy beaches and magical rainforests.

In 2015 I had led many trips one after the other and I needed a break, so I started looking at my bucket list. My thoughts became fixated on Fiji and the Shining Parrots. As I live in Bali, Indonesia, the flights to Fiji were not that expensive. I had a short conversation with a friend of mine, Bob Jackson, about my plans to visit this country and he immediately decided to join me.

Bob had previously travelled with me to some remote and rarely visited places such as the Buru and Sula Islands in Indonesia. We were among the first birders to visit these places, looking for special endemic parrot species. We will write about these trips in the near future.

The trip started taking shape and we decided to meet when we landed at Nadi Airport in Veti Levu. Our goal was to observe at least two of the three species of Shining Parrots, along with Collared Lories, and any other bird species we encountered along the way would be a bonus.

We decided to first focus on the Masked Shining Parrot *Prosopeia personata* which is endemic to Viti Levu Island, where we would begin our adventure. Secondly, because of our limited time, we would then travel to Taveuni Island to search for the endemic Red Shining Parrot *Prosopeia tabuensis*. The third Shining Parrot species, the Crimson Shining Parrot *Prosopeia splendens* is endemic to Kadavu Island and would have to wait for another trip.



Masked Shining Parrot
PHOTO DUBI SHAPIRO
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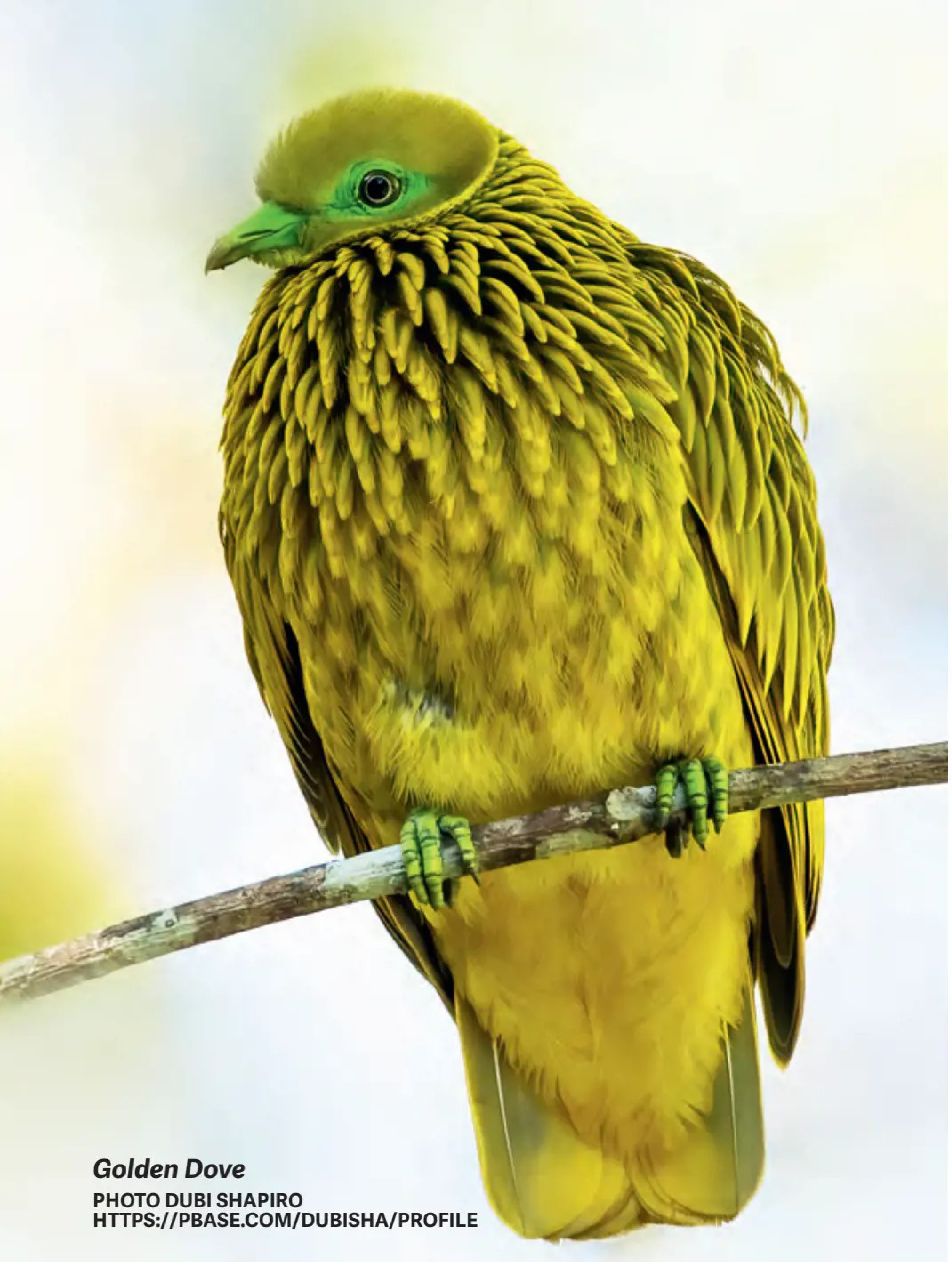
Masked Shining Parrot
PHOTO MEHD HALAOUATE



Golden Dove
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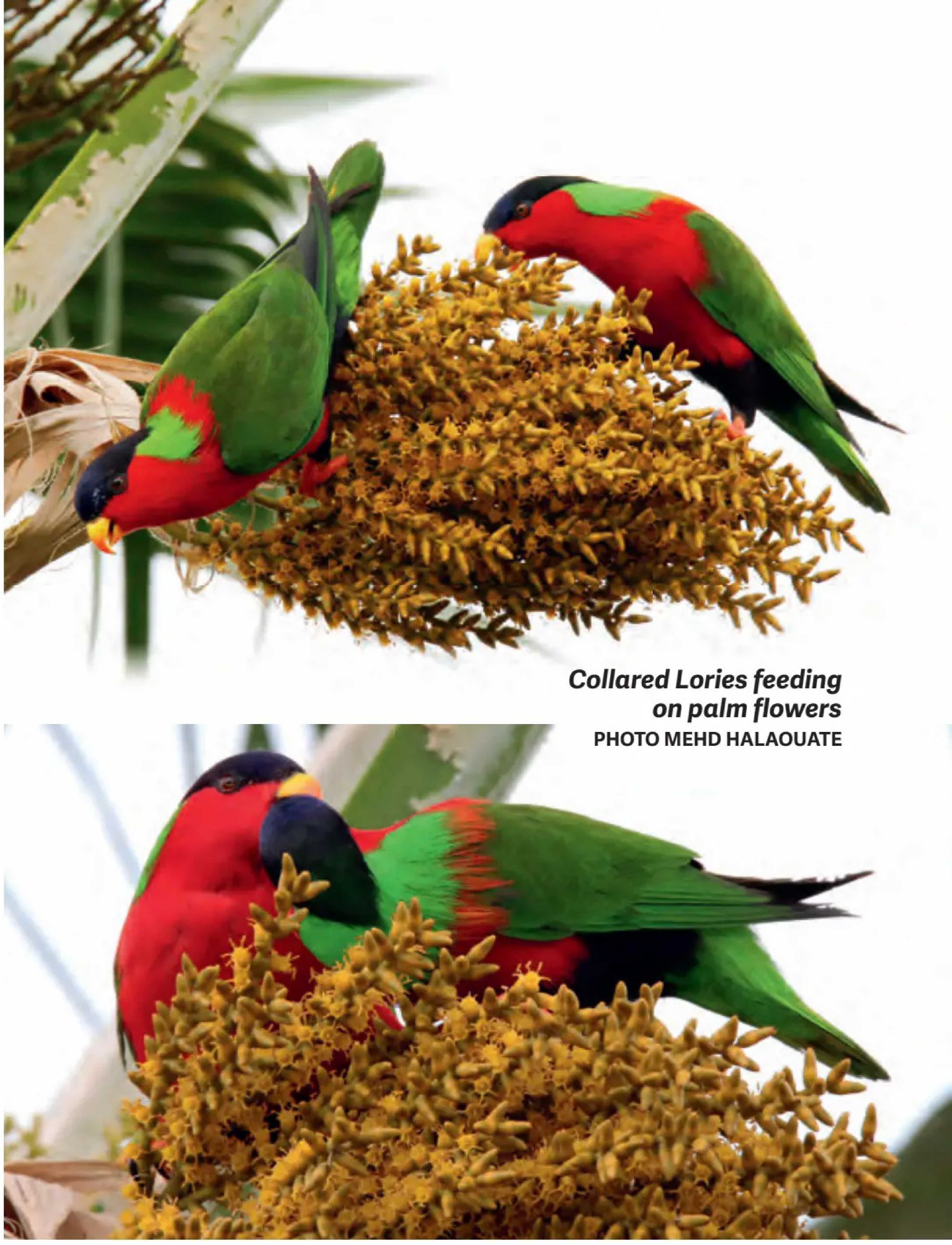


Collared Lories feeding on palm flowers
PHOTO MEHD HALAOUATE

THE TRIP

On the first of November 2015, I met Bob at the airport in Nadi, and our birding commenced immediately. Within the airport grounds, we saw species such as the introduced, Red-vented Bulbul, Common and Jungle Mynas, and a few Fiji Woodswallows that were busy showing off their flight skills whilst catching insects on the wing.

Our first destination was the Colo-i-Suva Rainforest Lodge in Suva. We took the public bus that covered this route in about 3.5 to 4 hours. The scenery was breathtaking as we passed beautiful beaches and lush forests. The drive also took us through several villages en route to the Lodge.

It was dark by the time we arrived at the Lodge, so after checking in we went straight to bed, as we had an early start the next day. We had read a few reports of the Masked Shining Parrot having been spotted within the grounds of the Lodge, so were very excited to get started with our birding.

OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER

We awoke to an early morning chorus of bird songs; nothing beats waking up in a new location to the sounds of unfamiliar bird species and the excitement of discovering what species they are. Most of the species on Viti Levu Island were new to us, which further enhanced our feeling of excitement. Before long, we heard the distinct sound of a parrot call, that of a Masked Shining Parrot! We rushed outside and started scanning the trees within the garden. It must have just flown past, as we couldn't locate the bird(s).

THE NATIONAL PARK

After a delicious breakfast at the Lodge, we started heading for the National Park. A quick chat with a ranger at the gate provided some information about our chances of seeing these parrots. Our prospects sounded good, and as we were about to cross the road to enter the park a pair of Masked Shining Parrots landed in the trees by the road's edge. With binoculars up, we could immediately see why these birds are called Shining Parrots, they were a sight to behold. Their striking eyes were a feature that couldn't be missed, so piercing and red.

We quickly took a few photos before they decided that they had had enough of us and flew off. As satisfying as this sighting was, we still needed more. The walk into the National Park didn't offer much more, apart from a glimpse of another pair of Masked Shining Parrots from afar. Road works were happening at the time, so it was a bit too noisy to allow us to enjoy the birding. We were happy when we finally arrived at the start of the trail.

We could hear the parrots frequently but sighting them was not an easy task. We spent a few hours scanning the trees all along the trail on the way down to a waterfall. The highlights of our time spent in this national park were seeing the Azure-crested Flycatcher *Myiagra azureocapilla*, the Fiji Parrotfinch *Erythrura pealii* and the stunning Golden Doves *Ptilinopus luteovirens* among other bird species.

It started getting unbearably hot, so we decided to head back to the Lodge. Suddenly, we heard a familiar sound, that of lories flying over the road. It was a pair of Collared Lories *Phigys solitarius*, but they flew very swiftly and didn't give us a chance to see them.

On our walk back, we came across another dirt road leading to some gardens at the edge of the national park, so we decided we would explore this road the following day.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

The introduced, Red-vented Bulbuls, and Common and Jungle Mynas were very common on Viti Levu, and we encountered them often. All three species are very aggressive, causing problems for the native birds. They are beautiful, but they don't belong there.

ANOTHER ENCOUNTER WITH SHINING PARROTS AT THE LODGE

Back at the Lodge, we were happy to again encounter the Shining Parrots in the gardens. Viewing them wasn't hard, but getting decent photos of them was nearly impossible, as they stayed well hidden in the canopy of the taller trees. They were feeding in these trees, so we were fortunate to be able to observe them for an extended period, which was very satisfying.

Later that afternoon, we spent time in areas close to the Lodge where we were treated to more Shining Parrots flying past, along with sightings of other bird species such as the Giant Honeyeater *Gymnomyza viridis*, the Polynesian Triller *Lalage maculosa*, including a female sitting on her nest, and a few Sulphur-breasted Myzomelas *Myzomela jugularis* feeding on the abundant flowering trees and bushes.

Fiji Parrotfinch
PHOTO DUBI SHAPIRO HTTPS://PBASE.COM/DUBISHA/PROFILE

MORE MAGAZINES XSAVA.XYZ

BACK TO THE NATIONAL PARK

The next day we trekked back to the National Park but this time we took the alternative dirt road that led us through some gardens. It was a nice walk, and more open so we could see further in front and to the sides. It didn't take long before we came across some more Collared Lories; what an amazing species! After scanning some of the trees we found a pair sitting high up on a flowering branch, and although quite a distance away, this was still our first decent sighting of the species.

We then left the forest and walked through a few plantations. We began encountering more new species such as the Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*, Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis flaviceps*, and Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*.

Fiji Parrotfinch
PHOTO MEHD HALAOUATE

STAY TUNED
FOR PART II

in Volume 37 Issue 7
of BirdKeeper

Fiji Silvereye
PHOTO MEHD HALAOUATE

MORE COLLARED LORIES

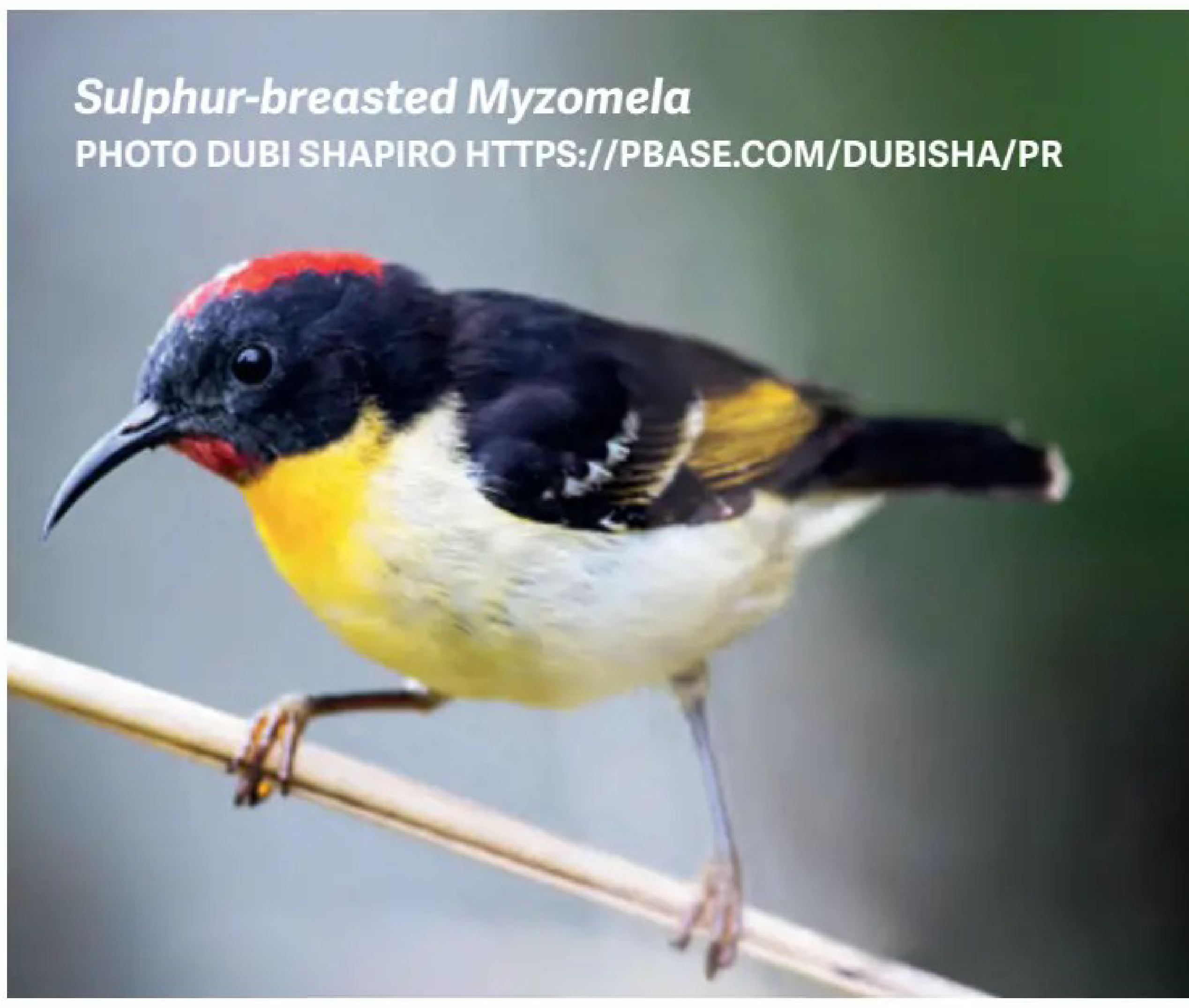
After walking for a further hour, we again heard Collared Lories, this time they were in some big trees close to a farmer's house. It was a small flock, feeding and playing loudly. They didn't seem to be bothered by our presence, so we stayed there for some time, enjoying the experience and taking as many photos as we could.

We could see that some of them were young birds, as they were practising their flying skills, which would come in handy to help them avoid predators such as raptors. Observing these stunning birds with Bob was very enjoyable, as he has a vast knowledge of Lory and Lorikeet behaviour. These birds are so beautiful that they nearly took out the top spot on our favourite birds of the trip list.

We continued our walk for a further hour and a half before arriving in a small village, where we encountered another pair of Collared Lories. This time they were in a palm tree and were not nearly as high up, feeding intensely on the nectar from the flowers. We spent a further 30 minutes watching and photographing them. The owner of the house was surprised by our excitement. For them, it was an everyday sight, but for us, it was an extraordinary experience that will remain in our memories for years to come.

Sulphur-breasted Myzomelas
PHOTO MEHD HALAOUATE

Red-vented Bulbul
PHOTO MEHD HALAOUATE


Sulphur-breasted Myzomela
PHOTO DUBI SHAPIRO HTTPS://PBASE.COM/DUBISHA/PR

OUR LAST MORNING IN SUVA

We spent our last morning in Suva searching for the Masked Shining Parrots around the Lodge again, covering as much ground as we could, and it proved a good move. Across the road from the entrance, there was a police station with a few fruiting trees in front of it. First, we heard the Collared Lories amid a feeding frenzy, so we slowly moved closer and closer. After some time, a pair of the Masked Shining Parrots joined the lories. It was a real thrill to be able to observe them from such proximity.

This was a great end to our time on this island, and we were ready to head to the next destination to track down the second Shining Parrot on our list, the Red Shining Parrot *Prosopeia tabuensis*. To reach Taveuni island, we had to travel overnight by ferry.

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Parrot Conservation Indonesia

The Decline of Bird-Keeping

A CALL TO PRESERVE THE ART OF AVICULTURE

AUTHOR
SAM DAVIS

AVICULTURE has been a tradition and pastime for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. In its simplest form, aviculture is keeping a bird as a companion pet, but it is far more. It encompasses the study, breeding, and care of birds with a dedication that develops deep expertise.

For numerous generations, this pursuit has brought peace, fulfilment and purpose to enthusiasts globally, while playing a vital role in avian preservation and conservation. Yet in recent decades, aviculture has faced a decline, with fewer new entrants. As a hobby, it has declined, and even zoos (with some rare exceptions) have reduced the size and scale of their avian collections. This trend is concerning for its loss of expertise and its implications for avian preservation and conservation.

SHRINKING BLOCKS OF LAND

One of the most significant challenges to modern aviculture is the shift in housing trends. In the past, expansive backyards provided ample space for aviaries and bird rooms, essential for breeding and studying birds. These dedicated spaces allowed aviculturists to create optimal environments for their birds, accommodating individual species-specific complexes and management practices.

Today, high-density living is steadily becoming the norm, particularly in urban areas. The block sizes in new residential estates are just sufficient for a home, there is no backyard to speak of. Even in rural regions, where larger blocks of land are more common, the focus has shifted away from using that space for aviculture. This physical limitation has made it more challenging for new bird enthusiasts to establish and maintain the facilities needed for breeding and studying birds on a meaningful scale.

CHANGING LIFESTYLES AND GENERATIONAL SHIFTS

Modern lifestyles also contribute to the decline. With increasing work hours, time spent commuting, frequent travel, and digital distractions, fewer people have the time to dedicate to aviculture. This is not a casual pastime; it requires consistent daily attention to detail, observation, and care to ensure the health and well-being of the birds. It is hard to maintain a collection when you are only home on weekends during daylight hours.

Younger generations, in particular, are less likely to engage in traditional hobbies like aviculture, which demand patience and long-term commitment. Digital pursuits such as online gaming predominate as hobby activities. For most bird keepers the passion for aviculture developed at an early age via parents and mentors. If parents and mentors are not actively involved in aviculture, the knowledge and passion needed to sustain the practice will not be passed down to the next generation.

COSTS AND COMMITMENT

Once more than a pet bird is kept aviculture requires specialised knowledge, resources, and facilities. Breeding requires significant investment in aviaries tailored to specific species, high-quality feed, nesting materials, and access to veterinary care. For those in urban areas, finding a location to construct an aviary is difficult.

Experienced aviculturists understand the immense rewards of their efforts. Successfully breeding and studying birds provides not only personal fulfilment but also valuable insights that contribute to broader preservation and conservation outcomes.

PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION – A VITAL ROLE OF AVICULTURE

Aviculture is a cornerstone of avian conservation. By studying the habits, needs, and behaviours of captive birds, aviculturists gain critical knowledge that informs efforts to protect wild populations. Breeding programs managed by aviculturists have been instrumental in saving species from extinction, providing a lifeline for birds threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and illegal poaching.

Captive breeding and release programs, supported by aviculturists, are vital for reintroducing endangered species to their natural habitats. Species where habitat loss is critical are preserved in captivity for the enjoyment of future generations whether or not release back into the wild is possible.

OVERCOMING THOSE WHO OPPOSE CAPTIVE ANIMALS

The ethical dimensions of aviculture have also shaped perceptions. Whether we like it or not some oppose the keeping of birds in captivity. These people are passionate, often religiously so, about their opposition and they make their voices heard. Although in the minority the relentless loud expression of such views does influence public opinion.

Responsible aviculturists prioritise the welfare of their birds, they provide environments far exceeding basic standards. Spacious aviaries, carefully controlled diets, and enrichment activities allow birds to thrive physically and mentally. In general, the life of a captive bird is one of luxury without the daily fear of predators or the ongoing fight to find food and avoid starvation.

REINVIGORATING AVICULTURE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Efforts to educate the public about the joys and benefits of aviculture, combined with support for ethical and sustainable practices, can inspire a new generation of bird enthusiasts. Birds are more than pets; they are living links to the natural world, and aviculture offers a personal connection to them.

As aviculturists, we should take every opportunity to share our love of birds with everyone, in particular younger generations. Show them the joy and fulfilment you get from keeping your birds. Make it clear that aviculture is preserving species for generations to come.

Collared Lory

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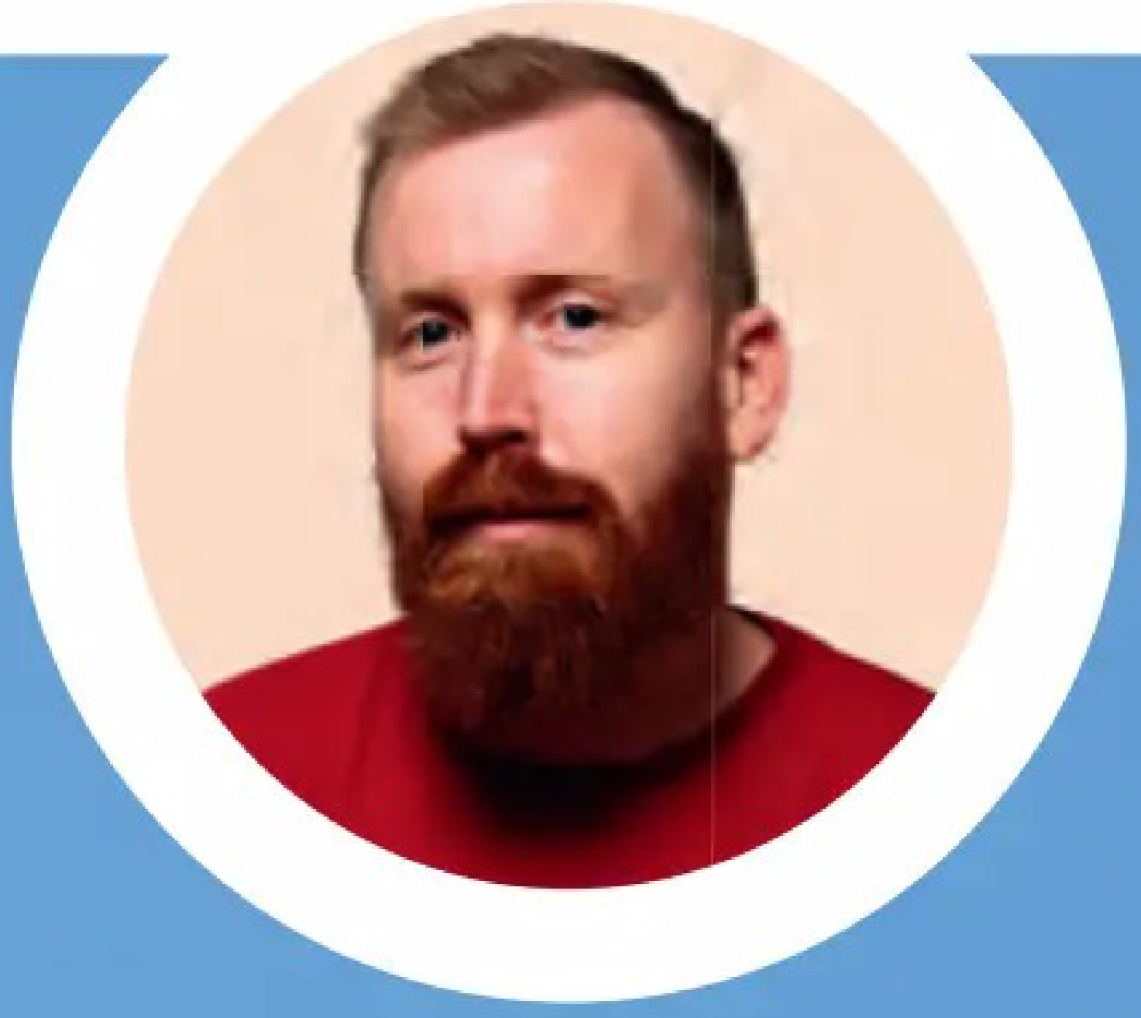
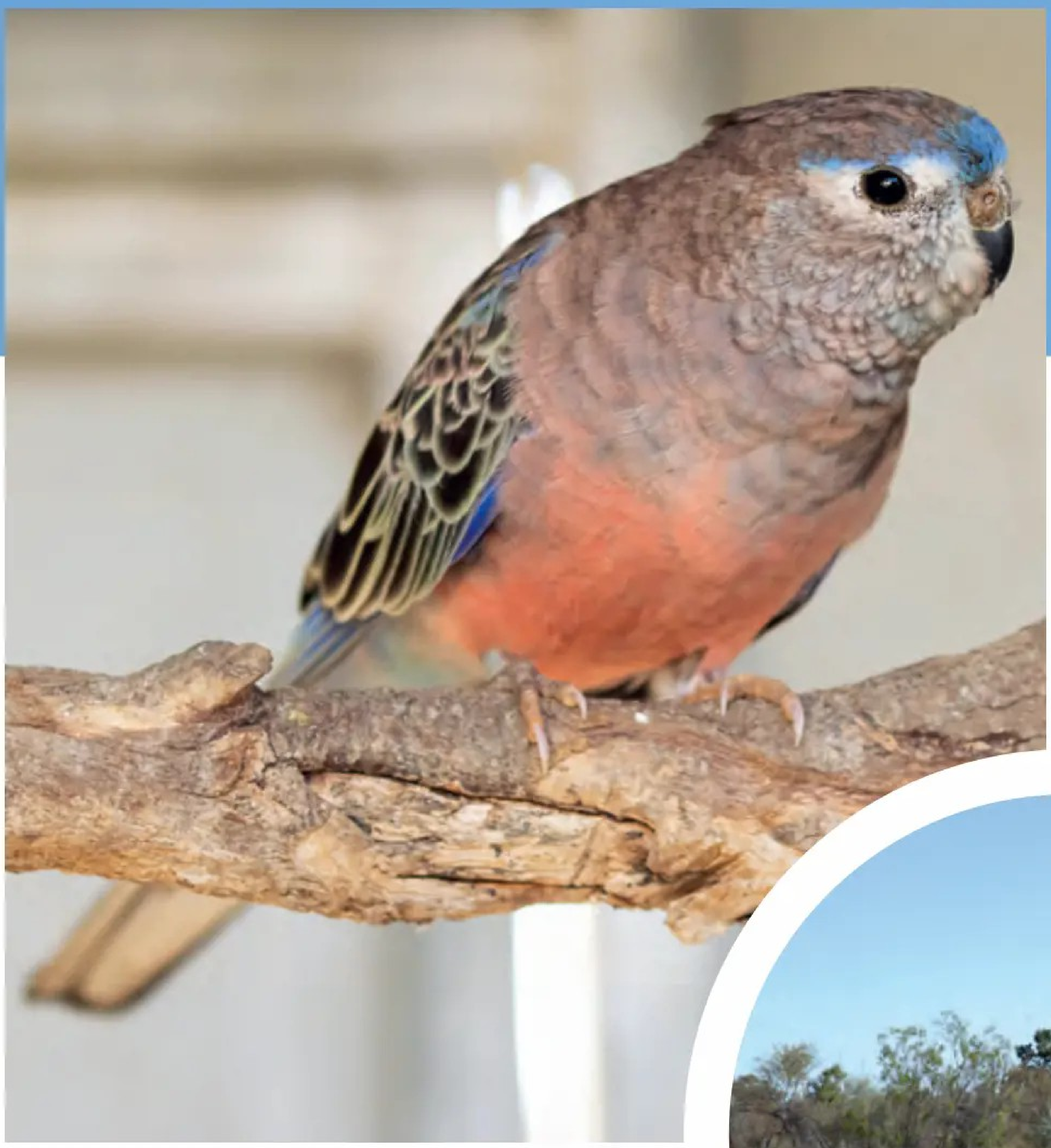
THE Bourke's Parrot

A LITTLE AUSSIE BEAUTY

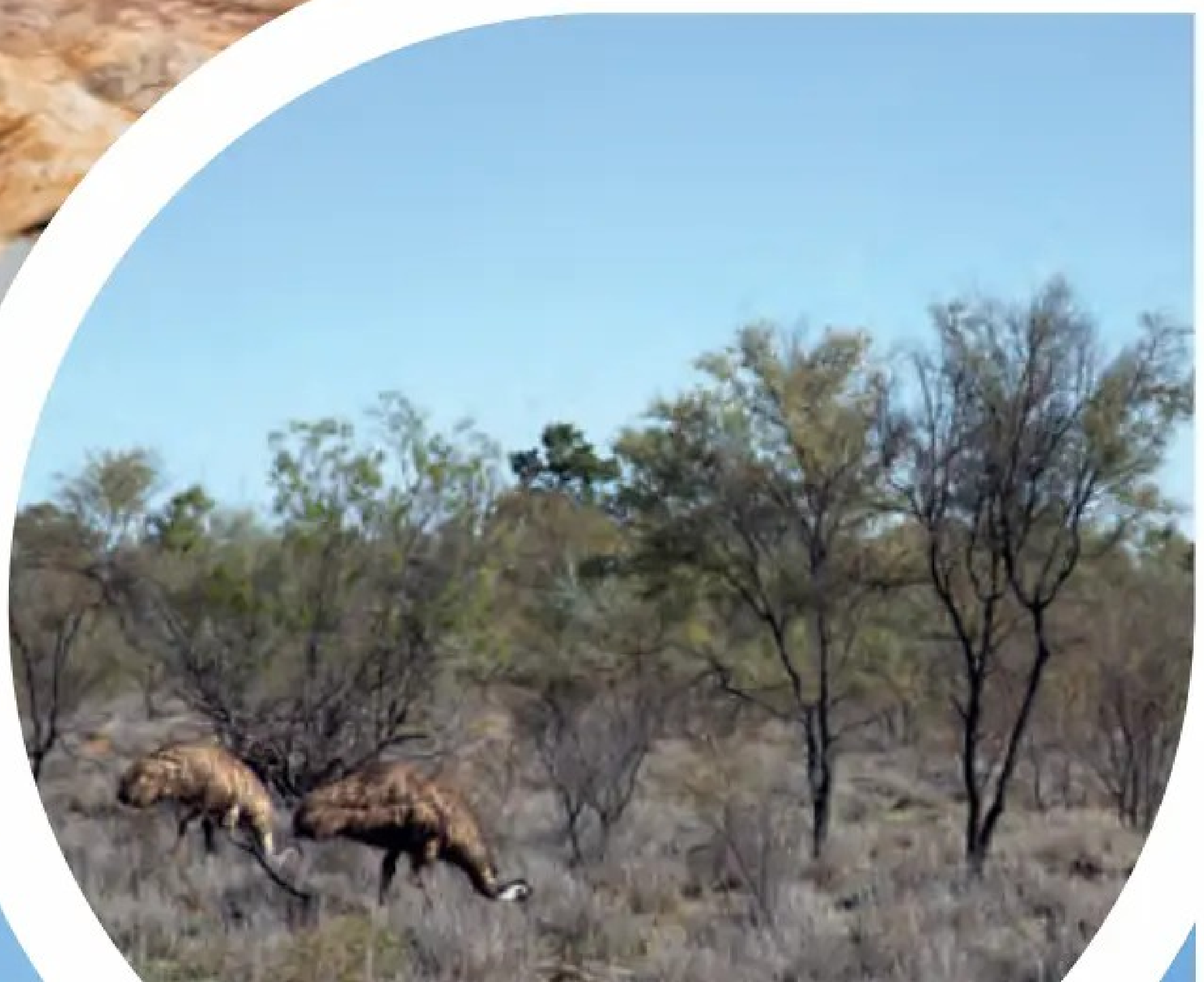


AUTHOR & PHOTOS
JADE WELCH

Wild Bourke's Parrot cock bird



Bourke's Parrot cock bird showing the prominant blue band across the forehead



Bourke's Parrots occupy arid areas such as depicted here

Wild Bourke's Parrots photographed in the early morning light

INTRODUCTION

Measuring around 19 cm, the Bourke's Parrot is a quiet and hardy Australian native species that is not demanding in its requirements. They are an arid-zone species that have adapted perfectly to aviculture and have long been a staple in the collections of both beginners and experienced breeders alike. In this article, I detail the captive management of this beautiful parrot, which is the sole member of the genus *Neopsephotus*.

HOUSING

Small in stature, the Bourke's Parrot can be suitably housed in either a conventional or suspended aviary of 1.5m or greater in length. Aviaries for Bourke's can be constructed using either galvanised steel or aluminium for the frame, Colorbond for the shelter, and galvanised aviary mesh for the flight. Information on aviary construction can be easily found online, within previous editions of ***BirdKeeper*** and in many of the ***'A Guide To'*** series books.

The advantage of housing Bourke's in a conventional aviary is that it will allow them to come to the ground, as they naturally do in the wild. To promote this activity, some breeders place food and water bowls on the floor of the aviary or throw millet sprays, greens and seeding grass heads on the floor for the birds to forage through.

The positioning of the aviary is important and should allow for enough light to enter the aviary but also prevent drafts. Shade is also important, particularly on hot days, however, if a tree is overhanging the aviary it may allow for snakes and vermin to get onto the aviary roof. The addition of a safety walkway to the aviary is recommended and will prevent heartbreak if birds escape when you are entering or exiting, stopping them from flying straight out into the territory of predators such as currawongs, butcherbirds and cats.

If housed in a conventional aviary it should be secured to a concrete floor with a drainage system to prevent the buildup of water and aid in preventing parasite infestations. Washed river sand or a similar material can be spread over the concrete to provide a more natural surface for the birds and can be easily raked to keep it clean and replenished as required. Washed river sand is an affordable material that can be easily sourced from hardware stores and landscape supply centres.

Nest boxes suited to Bourke's and other parrots are available from bird clubs and at bird sales

Birds of prey and butcherbirds can present issues by landing on aviaries. As such smaller aperture wire may be needed in some areas or double wiring along the front and sides to prevent predators from attacking the birds in the aviary. The use of smaller aperture wire may also assist in keeping vermin and snakes at bay.

Some breeders house their birds in groups in larger conventional aviaries during the non-breeding season, and then move single pairs into suspended aviaries for breeding. Greg Paull, a breeder from South East Queensland, warns that "Bourke's Parrot cocks can become quite aggressive around the breeding season if housed together with other cock birds, so housing single pairs per aviary will give the best results."

Other breeders keep their birds in planted aviaries with other species such as Peaceful Doves, Zebra Finches and King Quail. It is important however to ensure that all species that are housed together are compatible and even if birds are housed in single-sex same-species colonies it is important to keep an eye out for any displays of aggression.

FEEDING

Adding to their desirability, Bourke's Parrots are an easy and inexpensive species to feed. In the wild they feed on seeding grasses, the seeds of small plants and herbs etc. In captivity they do not require large quantities of food, however it is important to provide them with fresh and nutritious foods.

They can be offered a base diet of a suitable dry seed mix such as those designed for small parrots and/or parrot pellets. This should be supplemented with a variety of the following: apple, carrot, chickweed, warrigal greens, dandelion, endive, soaked seed, millet sprays, milk seed, seeding grass heads, etc. Greg finds that his birds readily accept Vetafarm Nutriblend pellets, beetroot and arrowroot biscuits.

Bourke's Parrots will also appreciate the provision of a fine grit mix. They will also relish fresh branches of native trees, with seeds and flowers attached, such as those from the *Leptospermum* or *Melaleuca* genera.

Live food and soft food may be offered, for example, mealworms, egg and biscuit mix, Madeira cake, etc. but are not essential. Some breeders prefer to offer live food and soft food only during the breeding season, whilst others offer one or both year-round, as is often the case when Bourke's are housed in mixed collections with finches and softbills.

Overall, the provision of a healthy and varied diet will be reflected not only in the plumage of the breeding birds but also in the chicks they produce.

BREEDING

Bourke's Parrots are a great species for beginners as they can be bred with ease and if given the opportunity, they can commence breeding at under a year of age, though it is advisable to hold off on letting them breed until they are in their second year. In addition to providing a quality, nutritious diet, as with most birds, good compatibility between pairs is important for breeding success.

In the wild, they breed in small hollows and likewise, they will do so if provided with a small hollow log in captivity. Small hollow logs look great in the aviary, however, for ease of cleaning and nest inspection, a nest box is often the better option. Suitable nest boxes are relatively easy to construct at home, though alternatively they can be purchased through bird clubs and at bird sales.

Untreated pine or hardwood shavings are suitable for use as nesting material, as is fine eucalyptus mulch. The nesting material can be treated with a mite and lice spray or powder to prevent infestations when chicks are being reared. Breeding can be encouraged by increasing the availability of certain foods, such as soft food or seeding grass heads, however, Bourke's Parrots are generally quite prolific regardless.

The hen lays 3-6 eggs which are incubated for 18-20 days. In the wild, hens may leave the nest during the day whilst incubating, if it gets too hot, and Greg has found this to be the case in captivity as well. Additionally, he has found that some hens will not commence incubating until the full clutch of eggs has been laid.

If you intend to leg-ring the chicks, this is best done in the nest with closed bands, although, if necessary, split rings can be fitted after fledging. In Greg's experience, some hens "stop brooding chicks once they reach approximately 14 days of age." This can be an issue if the days or nights are cold, so careful attention should be paid. Upon fledging, the chicks are fed by both parents. Recently fledged young can be spooked easily, so fresh tree branches, such as tea tree, bottlebrush or gum tree branches can be hung inside the aviary, at the front of the flight, to prevent them from colliding with the wire and injuring or worse still, killing themselves.

Bourke's Parrots do not require a large nestbox

Dandalion is relished by Bourke's Parrots

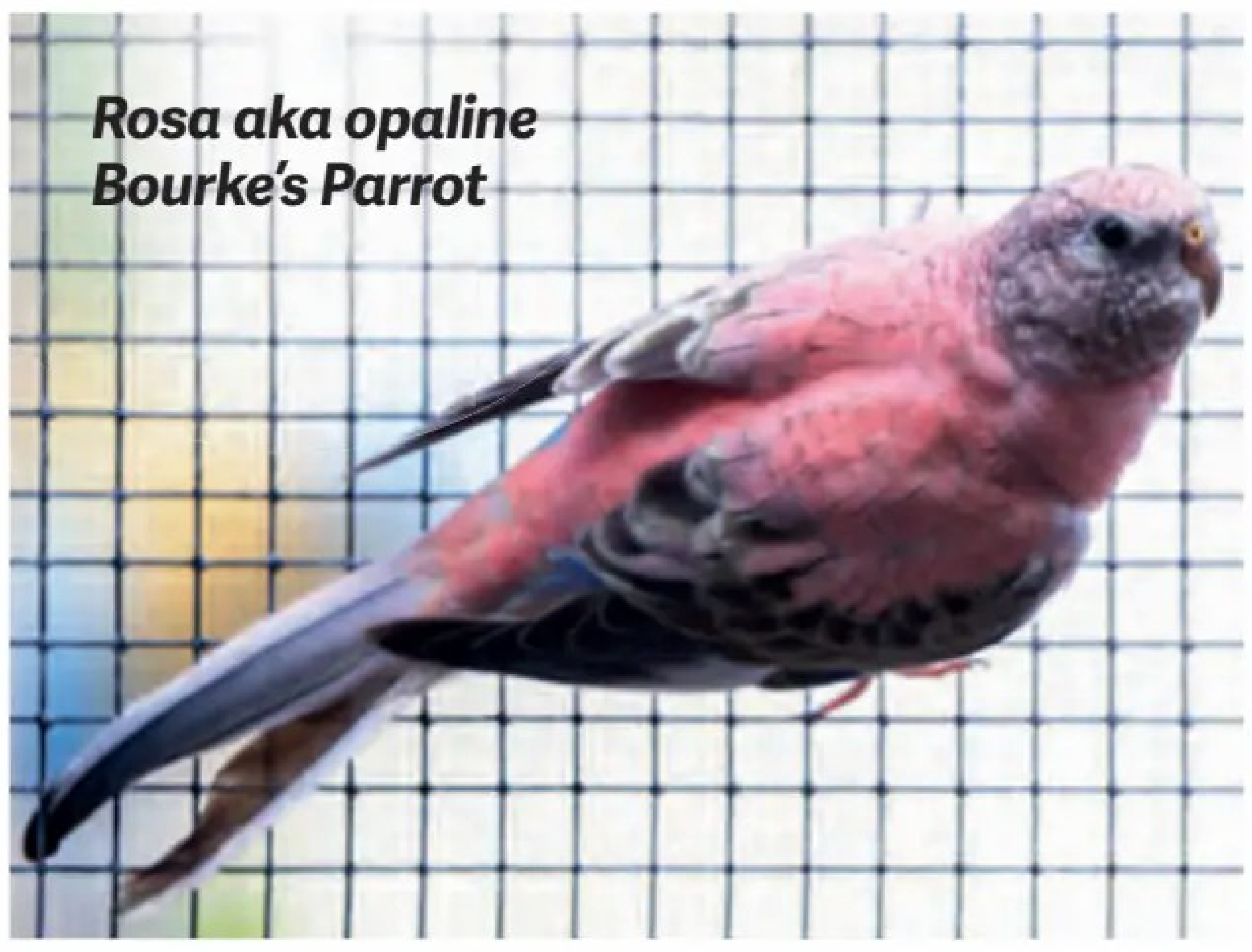
Endive is one of many items that can be fed to Bourke's Parrots

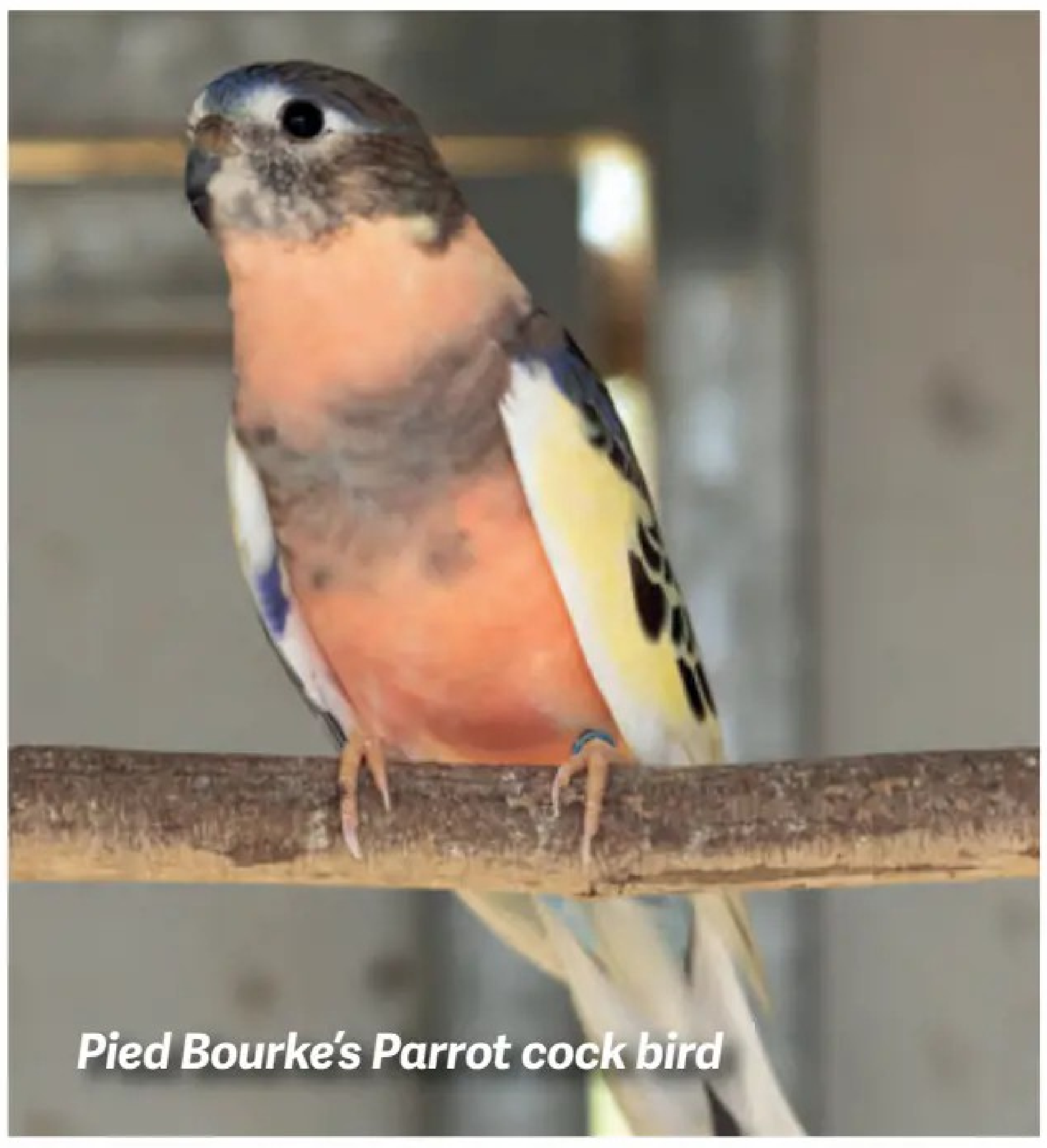
Millet sprays are relished by Bourke's Parrots

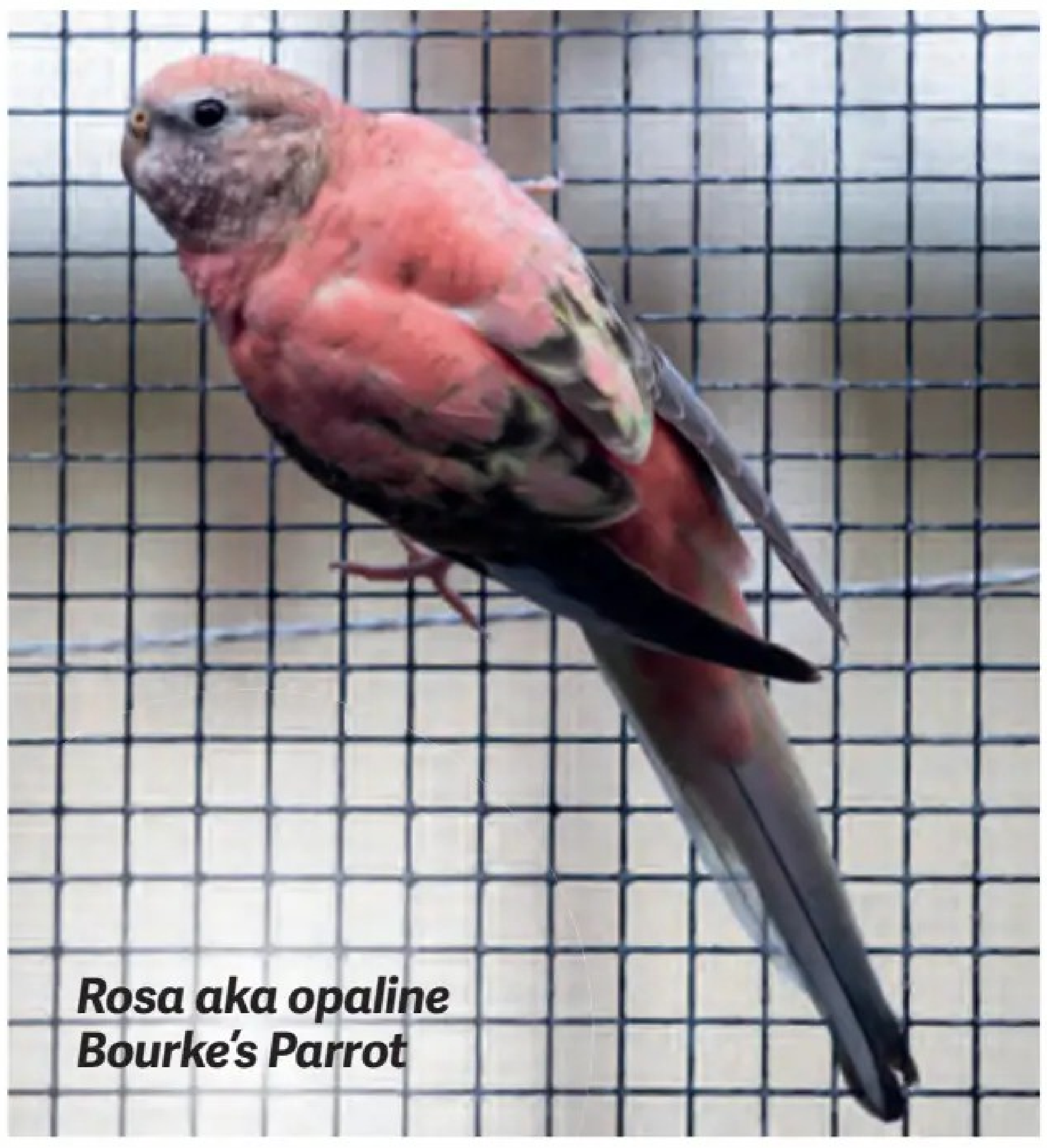
Examples of foods that can be fed to Bourke's Parrots including soaked seed, veggies, fruit and greens

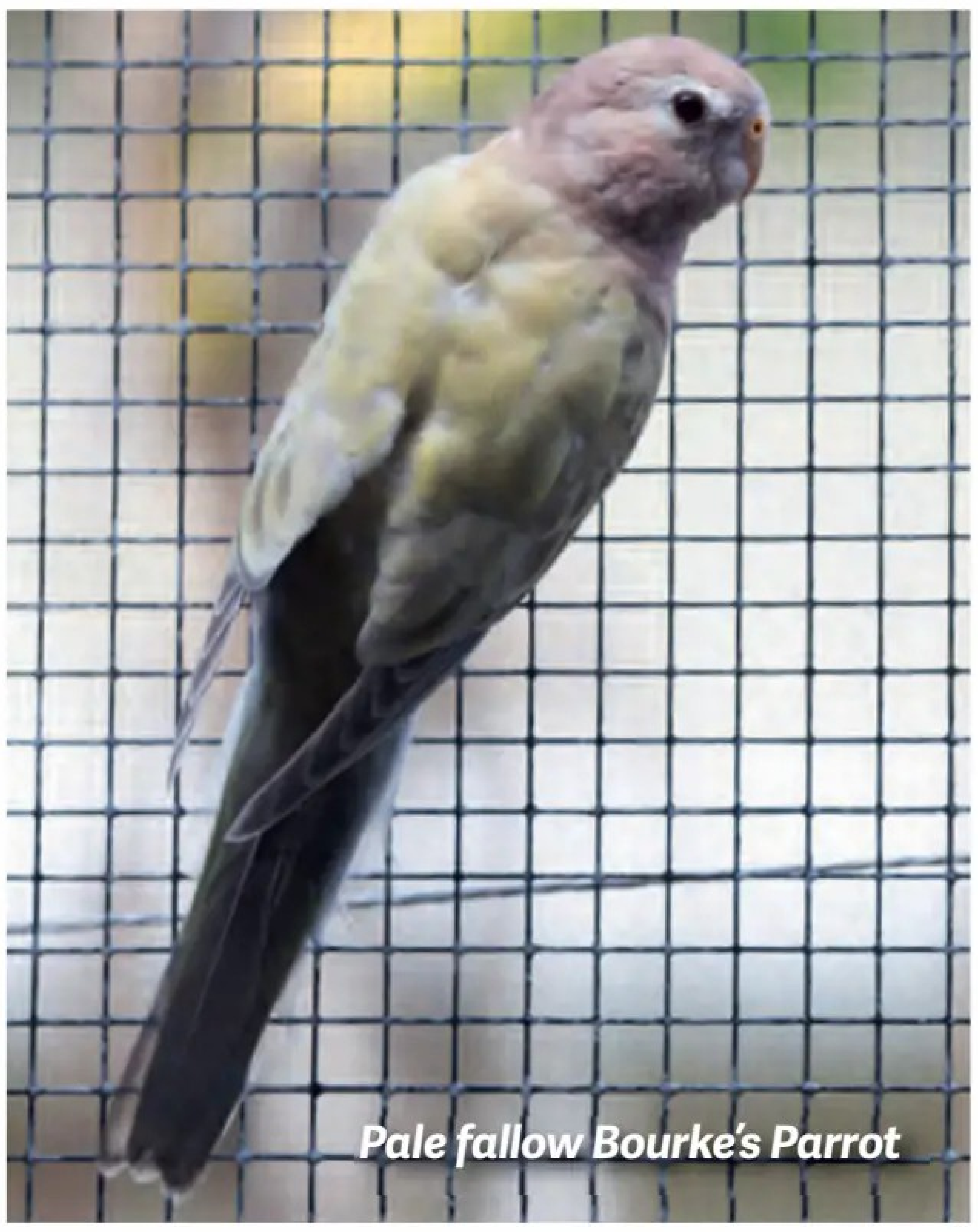
Greg feeds his Bourke's Vetafarm Nutriblend pellets

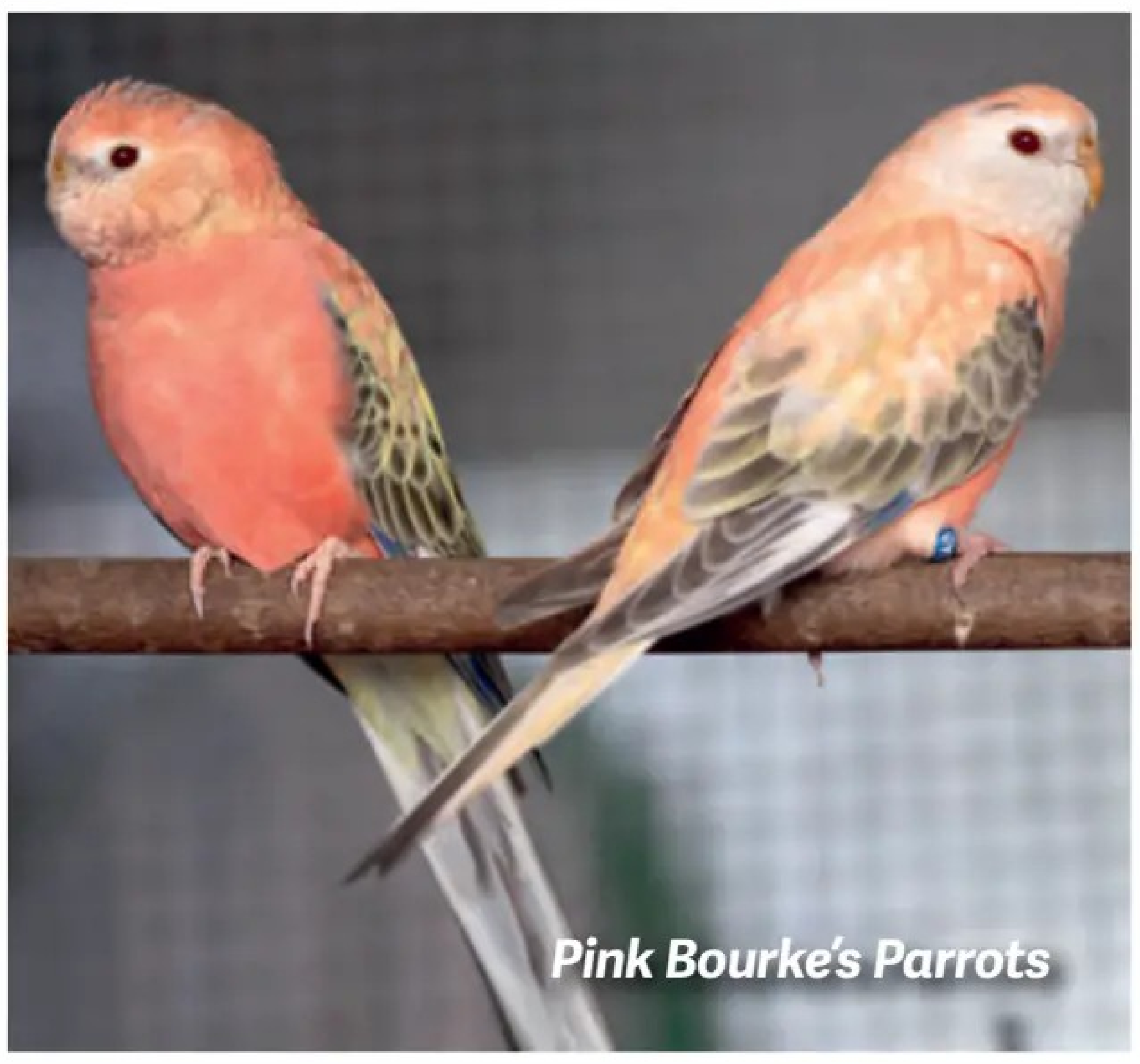
Once the chicks become independent and have been feeding themselves for several weeks, they can be removed from the aviary. Often, before this happens, hens will have already laid another clutch. It is important to note that if a hen is prolific, she will need a good supply of calcium to prevent her from becoming egg-bound. Cock birds may also become aggressive towards the young birds if the hen goes down again, and as such, this needs to be watched out for.

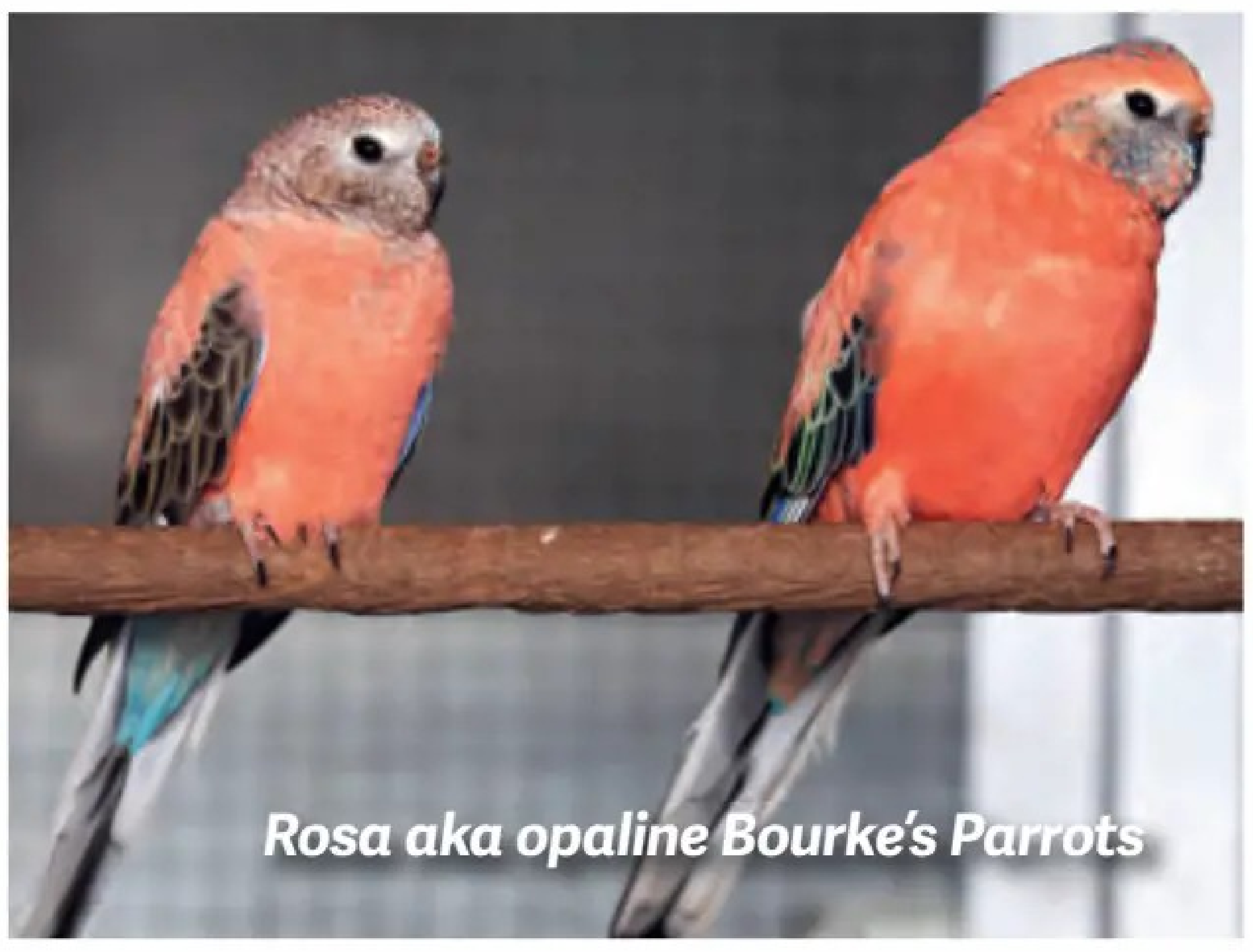

Rosa aka opaline Bourke's Parrot

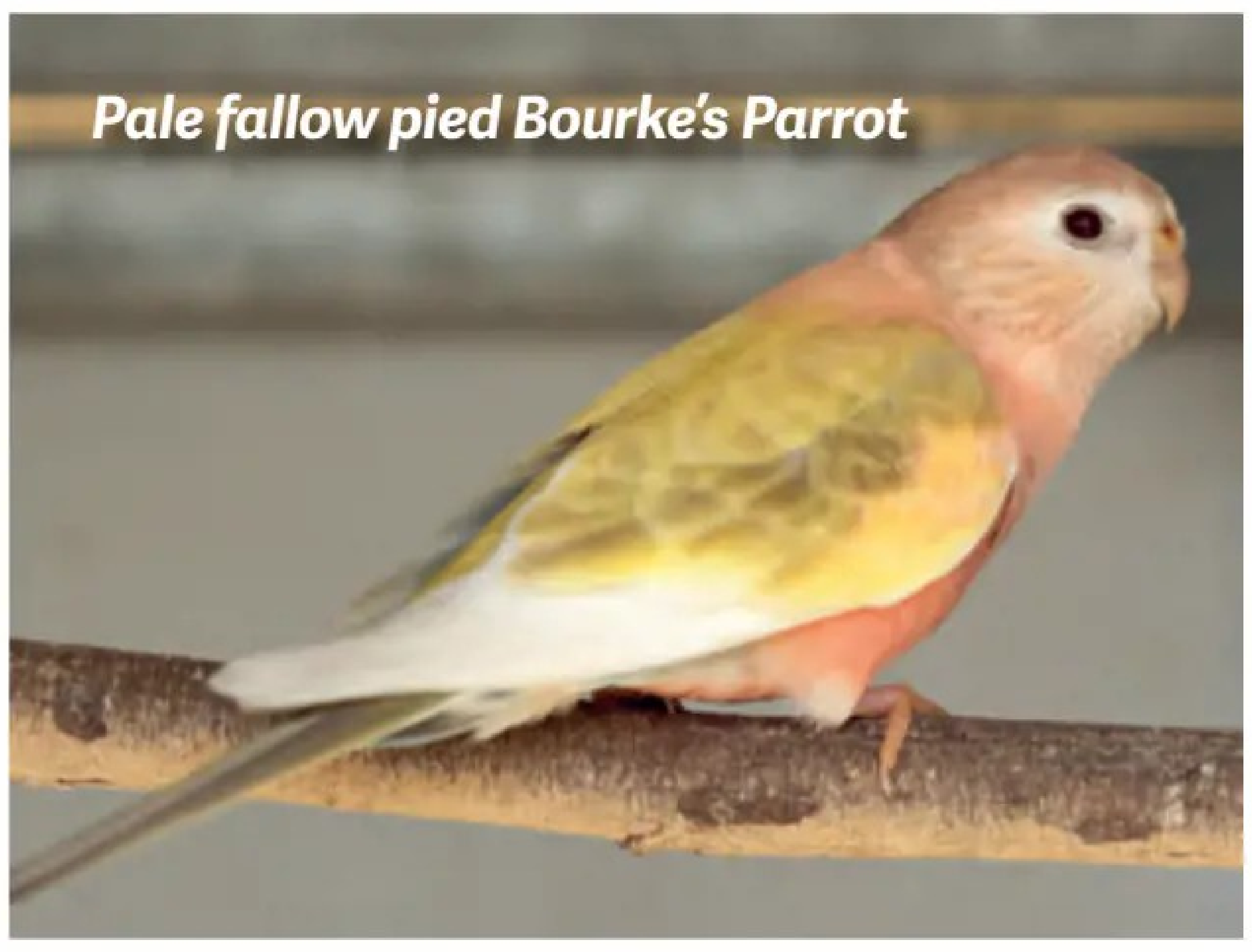

Pied Bourke's Parrot cock bird

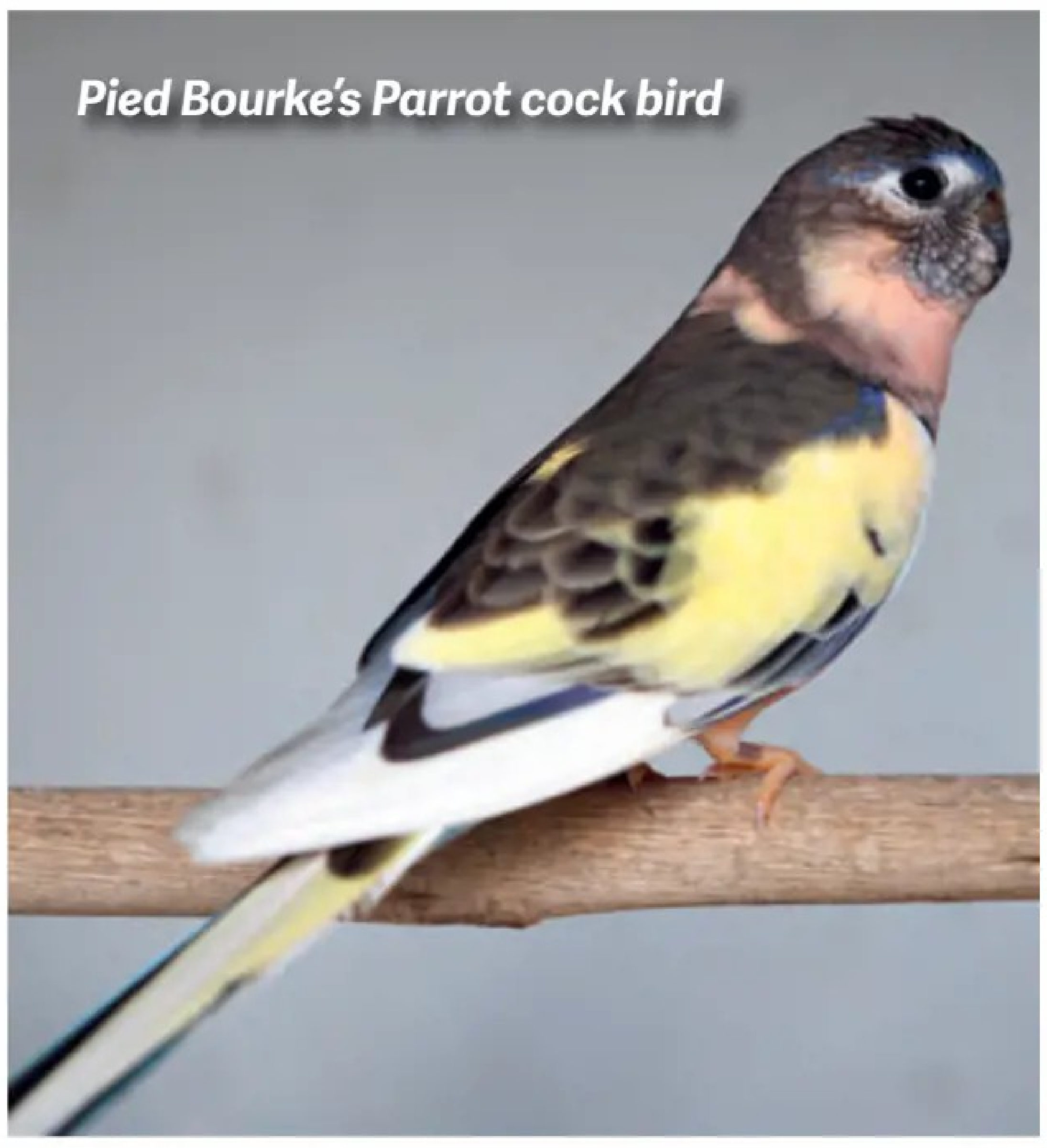

Rosa aka opaline Bourke's Parrot

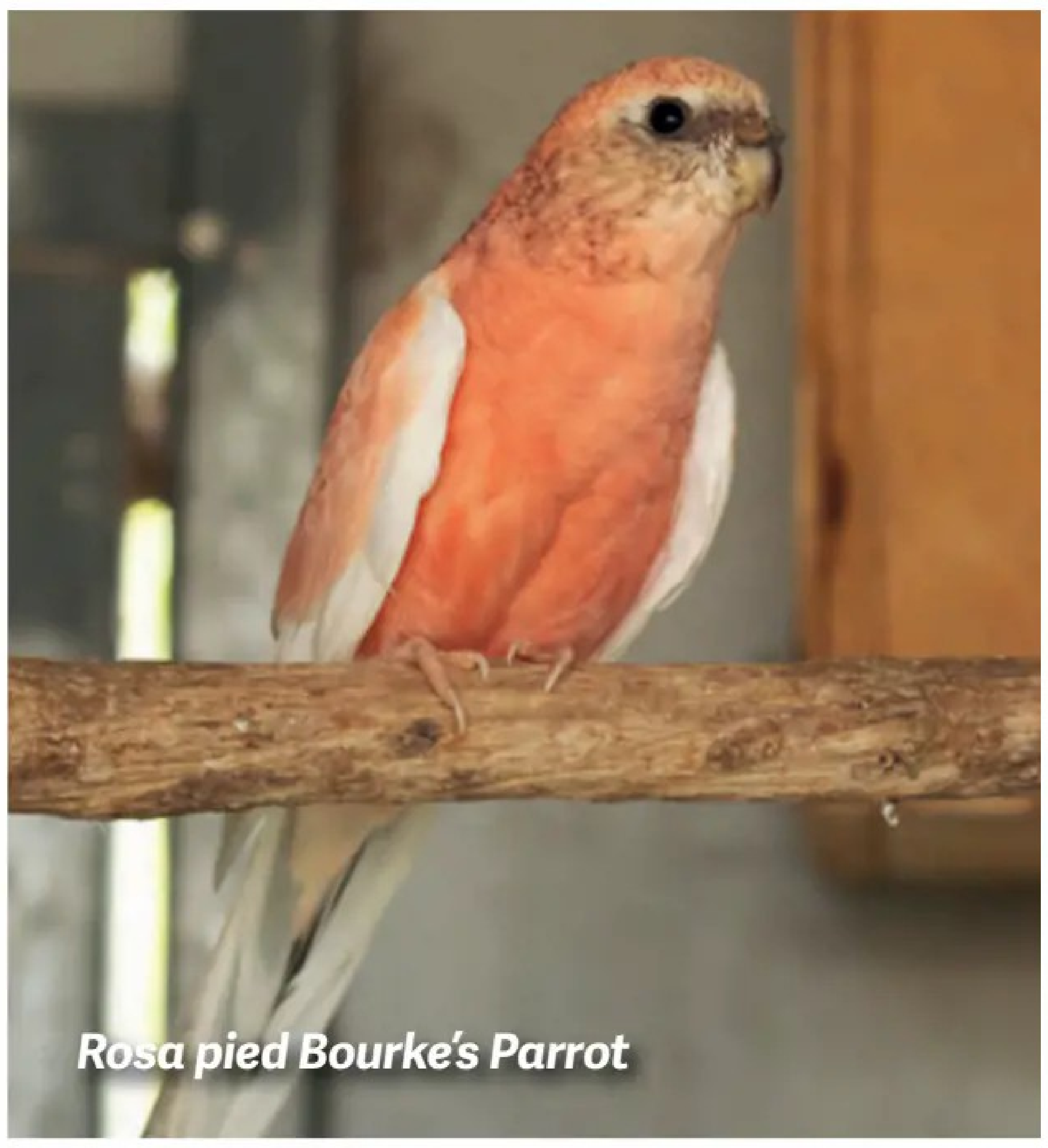

Pale fallow Bourke's Parrot


Pink Bourke's Parrots


Rosa aka opaline Bourke's Parrots


Pale fallow pied Bourke's Parrot


Pied Bourke's Parrot cock bird


Rosa pied Bourke's Parrot

MUTATIONS

Another point of interest for many breeders is the number of mutations that are now available. For a young breeder or someone new to keeping the species, great levels of excitement can be garnered from opening a nest box to see chicks in an assortment of colours. Several Bourke's Parrot mutations are now commonly available and are for the most part, inexpensive.

The mutations that are currently available in Australia include lutino, opaline (aka rosa), cream, fallow, and pied. A true-blue mutation has appeared in both Australia and Europe; however, it remains rare. In this mutation, all the pink is removed, leaving a bird that is brown and white with a blue rump, wing coverts and forehead.

Selective breeding to increase blue suffusion in the opaline mutation has been carried out by several breeders, however, whilst this has produced birds with noticeably more blue colouration, these birds differ significantly from the true-blue mutation.

Several combination mutations are also available including the famed pink mutation, which is a combination of cream and opaline. Another is a combination of the lutino and opaline mutations and is called rubino. Additionally, many Bourke's Parrots that appear to be wildtype birds are split to one or more mutations, so pairing two apparent wildtype birds together may result in chicks in an assortment of colours.

CONCLUSION

In a day and age where house blocks are getting smaller, noise complaints are more likely, and getting more people involved in the hobby is essential, we need to promote species that will appeal to and suit the masses. Sure, there are a few species that spring to mind, but the Bourke's Parrot is one bird that could be the answer.

I hope that this article sparks an interest in you, the readers of ***BirdKeeper***, and convinces you to add this little Aussie beauty to your collection. Whether you have kept them before or it is your first time trying your hand at this species, I am sure that you won't be left disappointed. Bourke's Parrots are just about the perfect species for the budding aviculturist just starting out and equally, a delight for the experienced breeder as well. They are a beautiful and easy bird to breed and a great species with which to learn your way around genetics and gain an understanding of colour mutations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Greg Paull for his input in this article and for allowing me to photograph some of the birds in his collection that are featured in this article.

POSTCARDS FROM VICKIE

AUTHOR
VICKIE LILLO

PHOTOS
GUSTAVO LILLO

Trinidad PART I

TRINIDAD'S BIODIVERSITY: YERETTE'S HUMMINGBIRDS AND POINTE-À-PIERRE'S WILDFOWL SANCTUARY

INTRODUCTION

The Sahara dust is settling like a haze over the entire city of Port of Spain, cloaking the distant ships and yachts, and enveloping the whole coastline in a powdery, yellow mist. Yet the Aeolian sediment seems to have no adverse effect whatsoever on the birdlife surrounding the gardens of our Airbnb lodging. Oblivious, these avian residents zip amongst the trees, consuming fruits and berries. And bugs. Chittering happily as they go about their daily activities: pollinating the flowers, dispersing seeds, and controlling insect populations, eliminating reliance on chemical pesticides.

THE BIRDS OF TRINIDAD

The birds of Trinidad are genuinely happy-go-lucky. They are protected country-wide, along with their feathered friends from their sister island of Tobago. "Some species of wild duck are included in the (4-5 month) hunting season," explains Stephen Broadbridge, honorary game warden for 10 years and head of Trinidadian ecotourism for over 30, "(but only) with permits." 'Pest' birds causing irreparable damage to crops can be extirpated on private property, but nowhere on federal or government land.

With 470 bird species to its credit, "though not as many as South America," Stephen concedes, this tiny Caribbean nation boasts several examples within all the major taxonomic family groups. No wonder we just awakened to the delightful chirruping of Orange-winged Amazons *Amazona amazonica* soaring above the next-door apartment. Though one-third of all parrot species are currently threatened with extinction, these lovelies are not in danger here. They are everywhere on the isle.

From the balcony, we witness one of these loud 'chatterboxes' perched in an adjacent mango tree. Nibbling one of its favourite fruits and showing off its blue and yellow head and perfect profile, apparently posturing exclusively for us. With head tilted back just for our amusement, the psittacine begins to trill a raspy melody.

Not to be outdone by the twittering, a Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus* joins the chorus. Bee-tee-wee, the male belts out his unharmonious tune. Again, the three-syllable ditty shrills – bee-tee-wee. Unappreciated for his warbling ability, this yellow-bellied, white-chinned flycatcher tyrant needs never fear the songbird poacher. As if sensing his discord and our lack of enthusiasm for his refrain, the kiskadee seems offended. He 'looks down' on my husband Gustavo and I, waggling his bright white supercilium – that 'eyebrow' of his – with disdain.

Suddenly, a Trinidadian subspecies of Crested Oropendola *Psarocolius decumanus insularis* glides by. Gorgeous saffron-coloured tail feathers reflect in the morning sun. Dubbed the 'corn bird' by the local Trinis, this *icterid* is headed towards her 125cm (4-ft.) nest, dangling from an isolated distant tree, and swaying gently in the breeze.

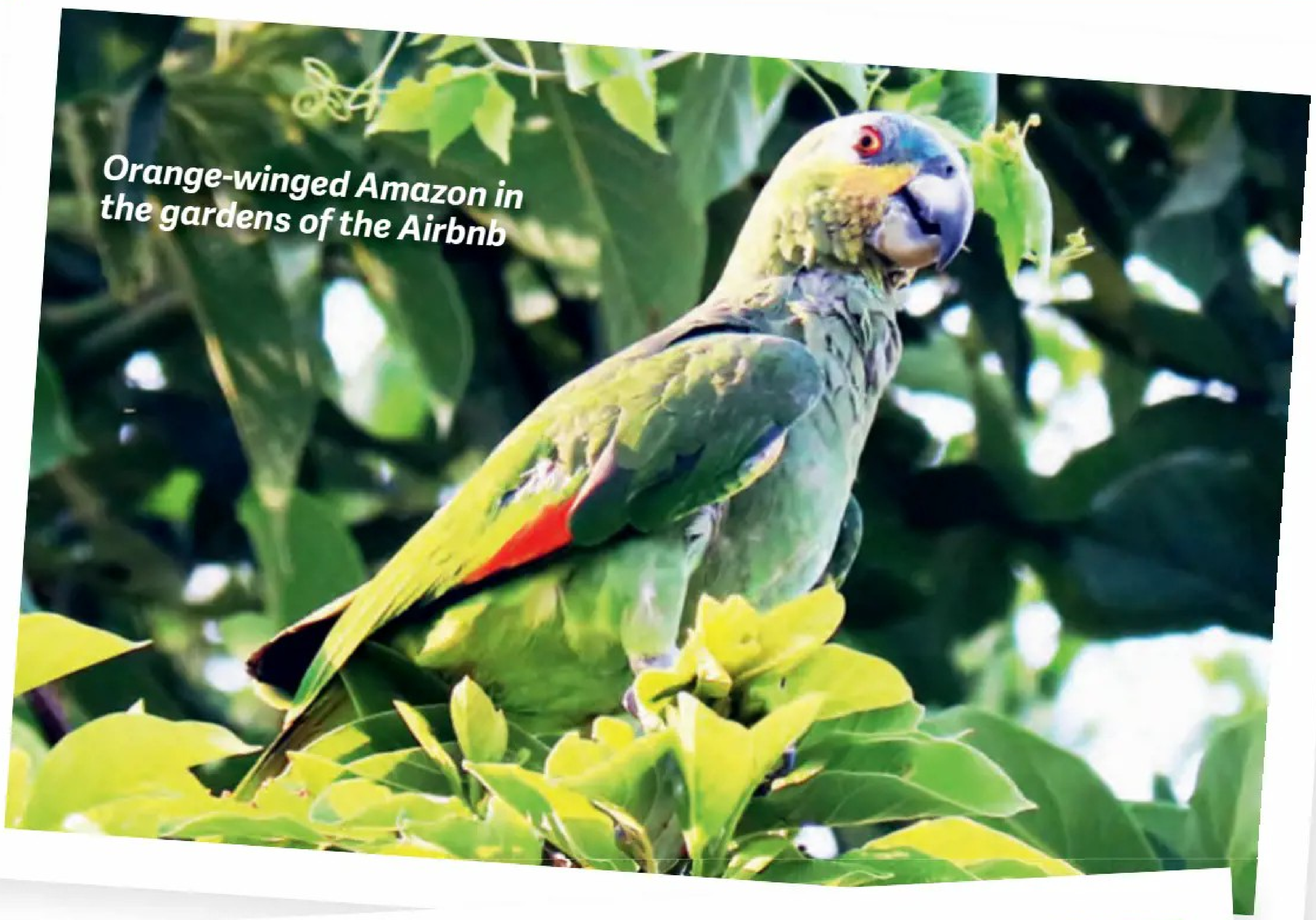
For roughly nine days, the New World blackbird female has painstakingly woven her pendulous nest, interlacing banana fibres and vines. To create an architectural wonder of the natural world...and hopefully, a roosting place worthy of her suitor. It would be almost shameful, upon his disapproval, to see the intricately braided sack be torn apart and scrapped. Requiring a second effort.

With one final tweak to the liana, the Crested Oropendola seems satisfied and flies off, to another sector of the landscape. Through my binoculars, I can see her ivory beak and pale blue eye as she passes. Later, from our Airbnb host Mark, I learned that "they love the Jamaican ackee tree out front."

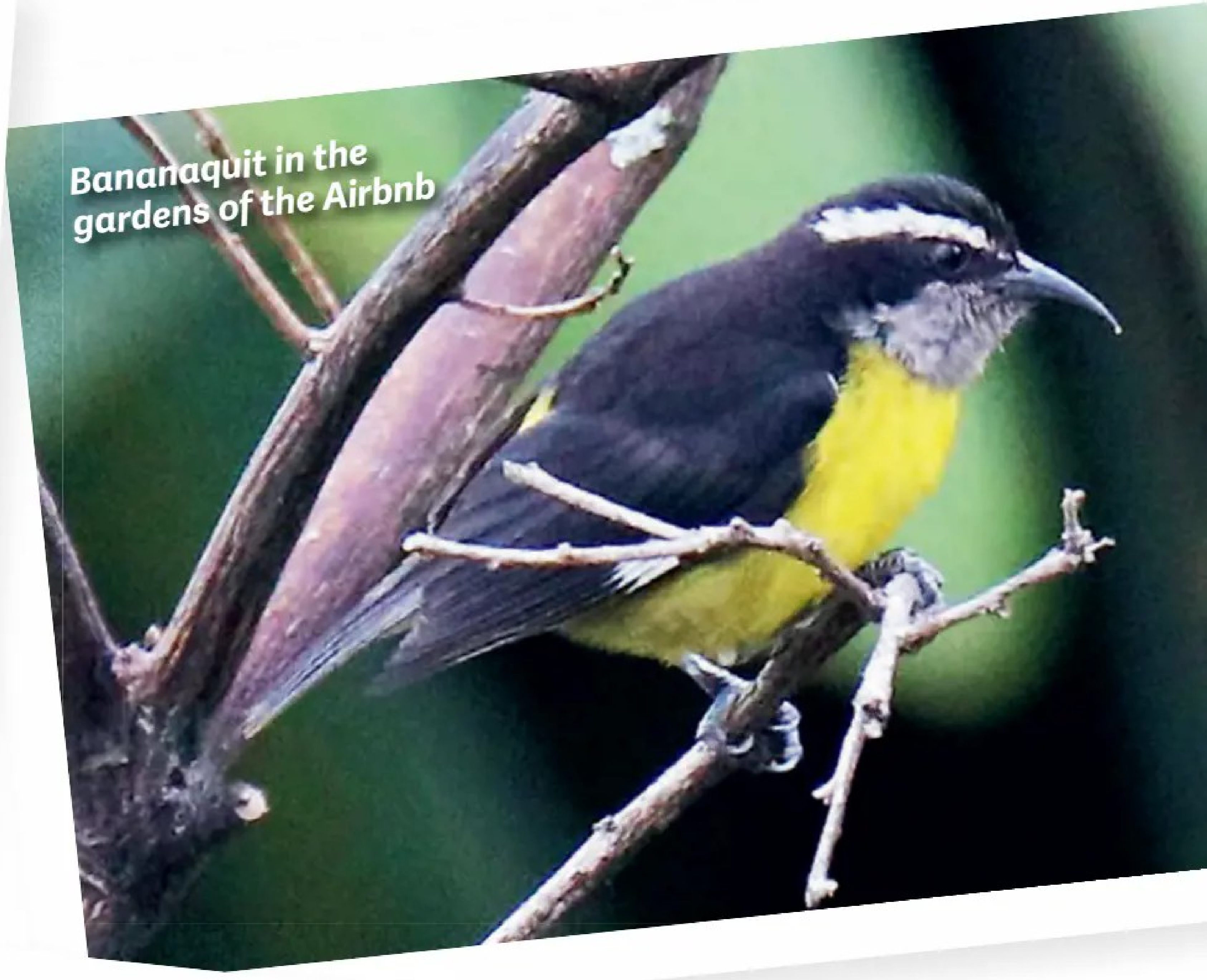
Another evergreen the native birds seem to adore – the sapodilla, with its 4-8cm (1.5-3-in.) berries – is always aquiver with avian life. Tanagers – Blue-grey *Thraupis episcopus* and Palm *Thraupis palmarum* – share the drupes with Tropical Mockingbirds *Mimus gilvus*. And the occasional Yellow Oriole Icterus *nigrogularis*. Though primarily an insectivore, this sunflower-and-black species frequents our patio ledge. To dine on Julie mangoes, the twin republic's national fruit.

Bananaquits *Coereba flaveola*, too, dart throughout the garden, amongst the flowering purplish-red bracts. Like miniature versions of the Great Kiskadee, these hyperactive passerines, with their extreme penchant for sucrose, are considered 'sugar thieves'. In urban areas, they often snatch the sweet crystals from restaurant tables. They swill nectar from flowers akin to the hummingbirds, yet lack the ability to 'hover'.

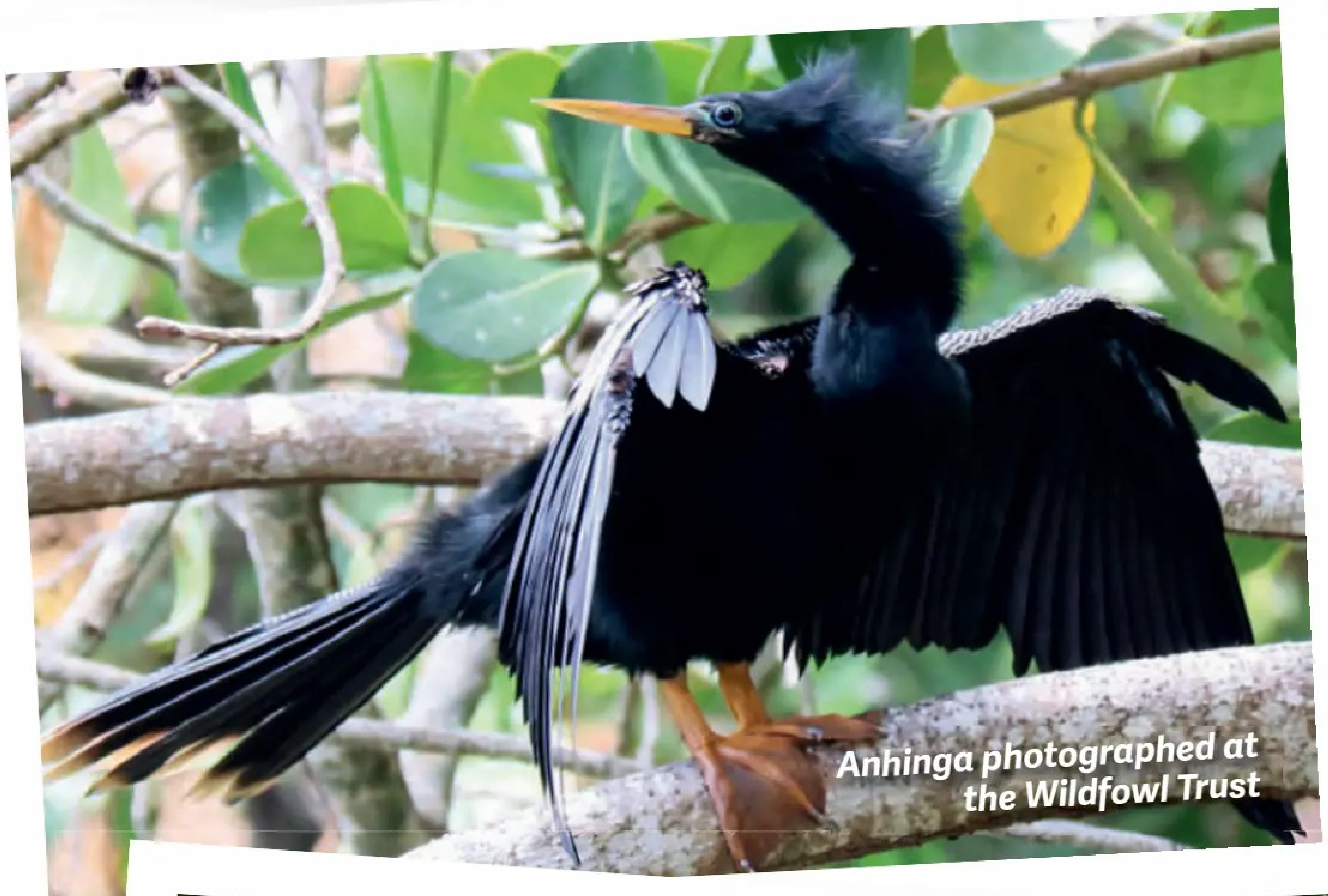
Speaking of hummingbirds...we notice plenty of the Copper-rumped *Saucerrottia tobaci* variety catching insects in flight. "Hawking", and exposing their glittery green heads, auburn rumps, and forked blue tails. They are the commonest *Trochilidae* in Trinidad and Tobago and breed year-round, excluding September and October. With their constant high-frequency flapping and



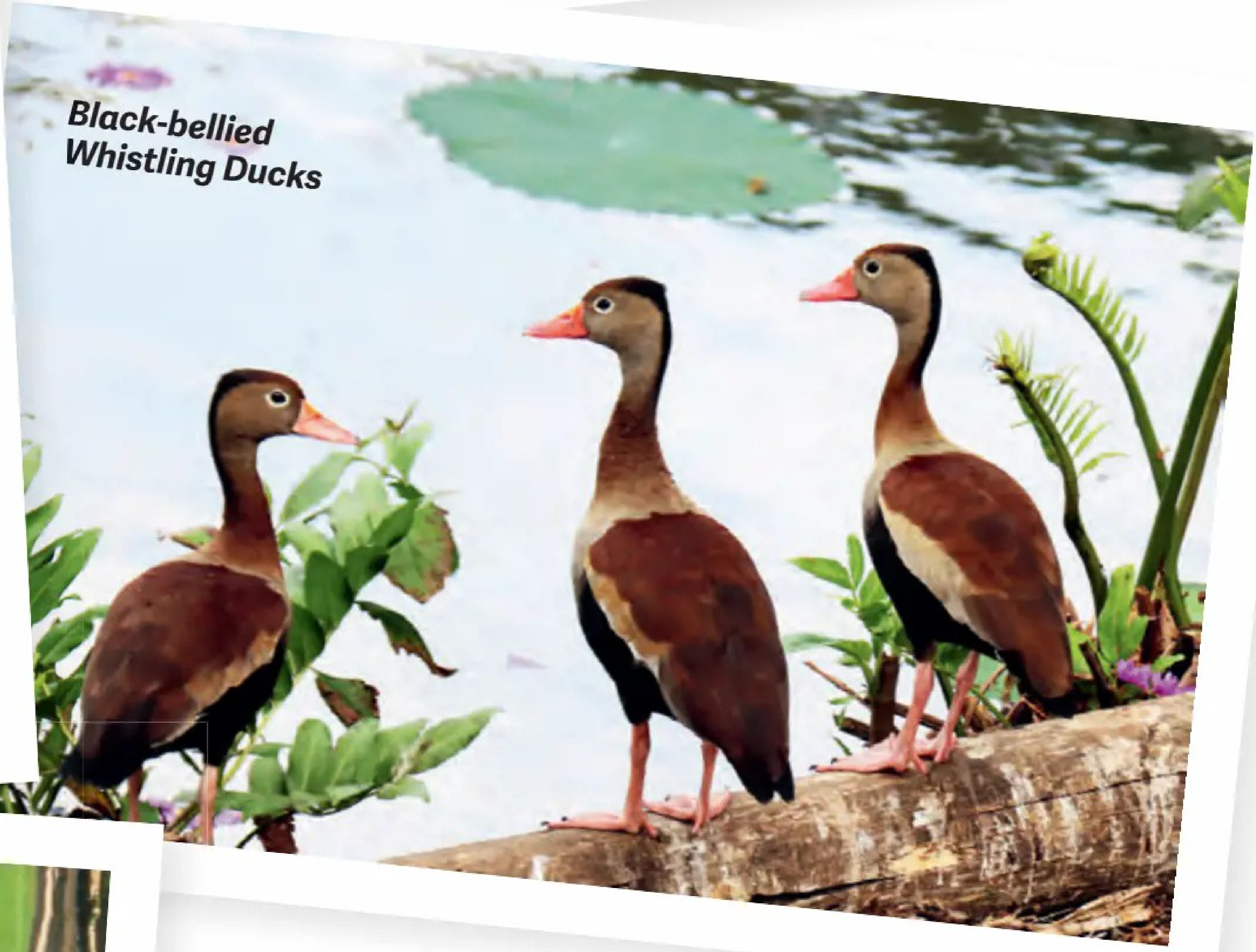
Orange-winged Amazon in the gardens of the Airbnb



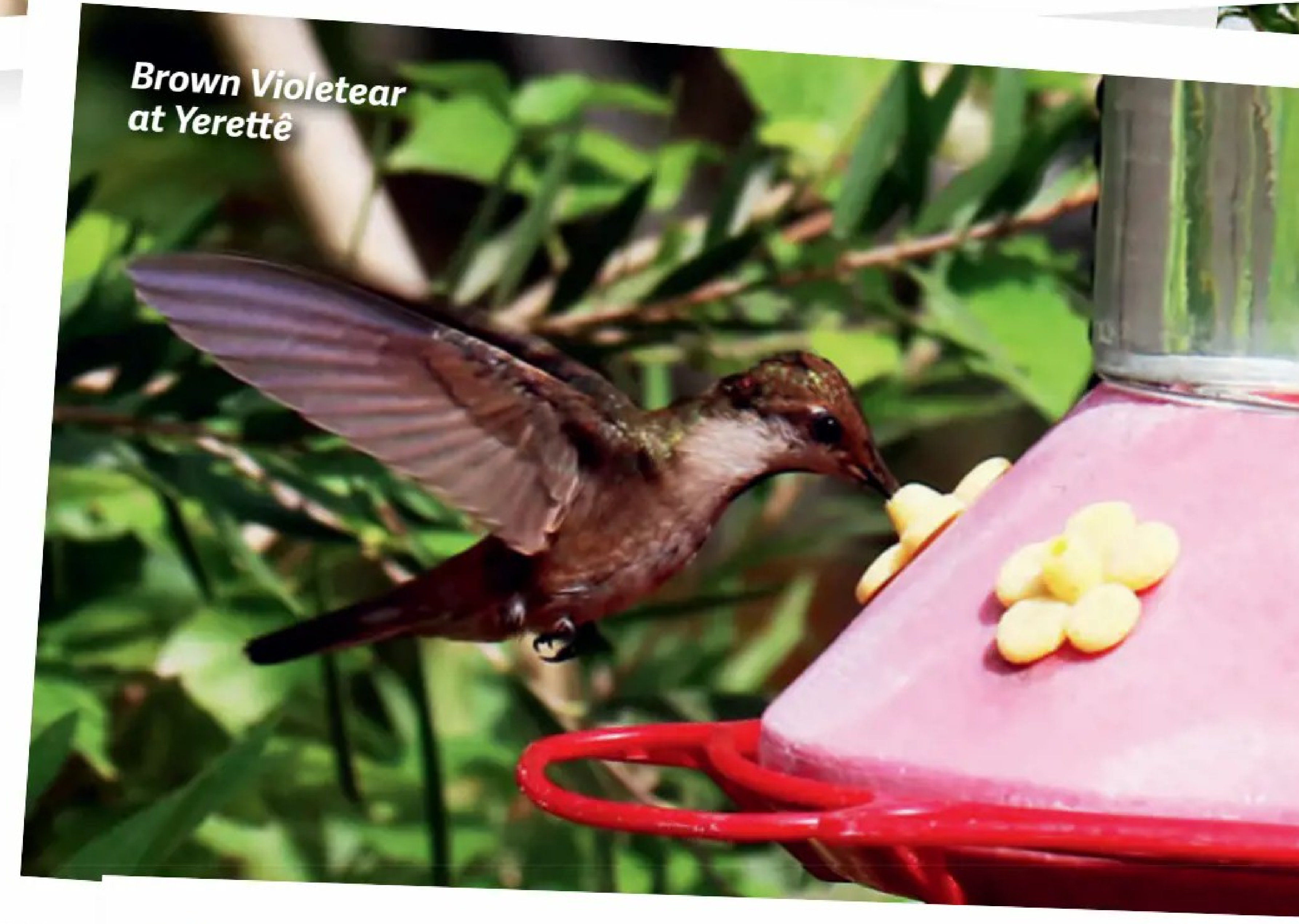
Bananaquit in the gardens of the Airbnb



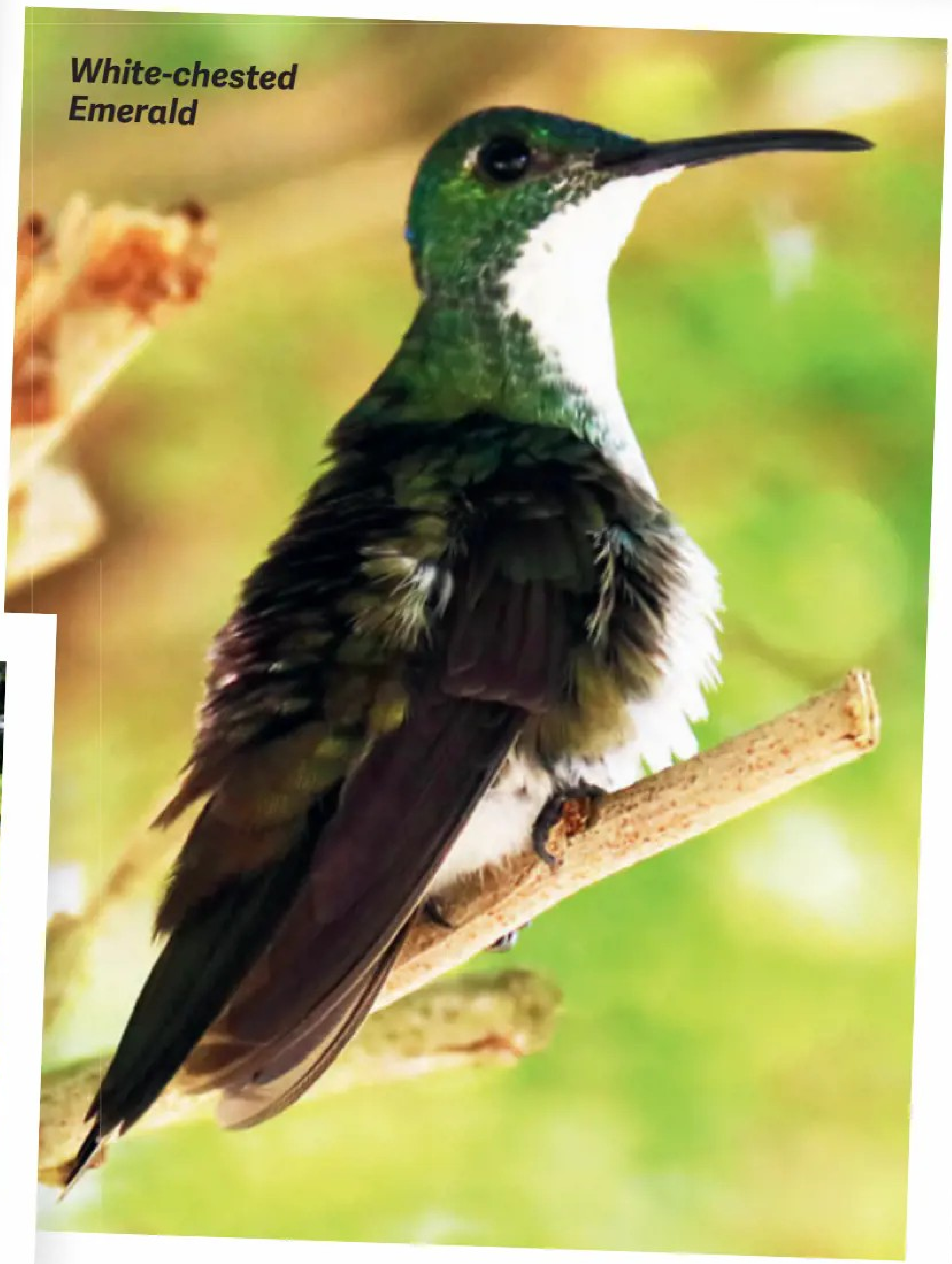
Anhinga photographed at the Wildfowl Trust



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks

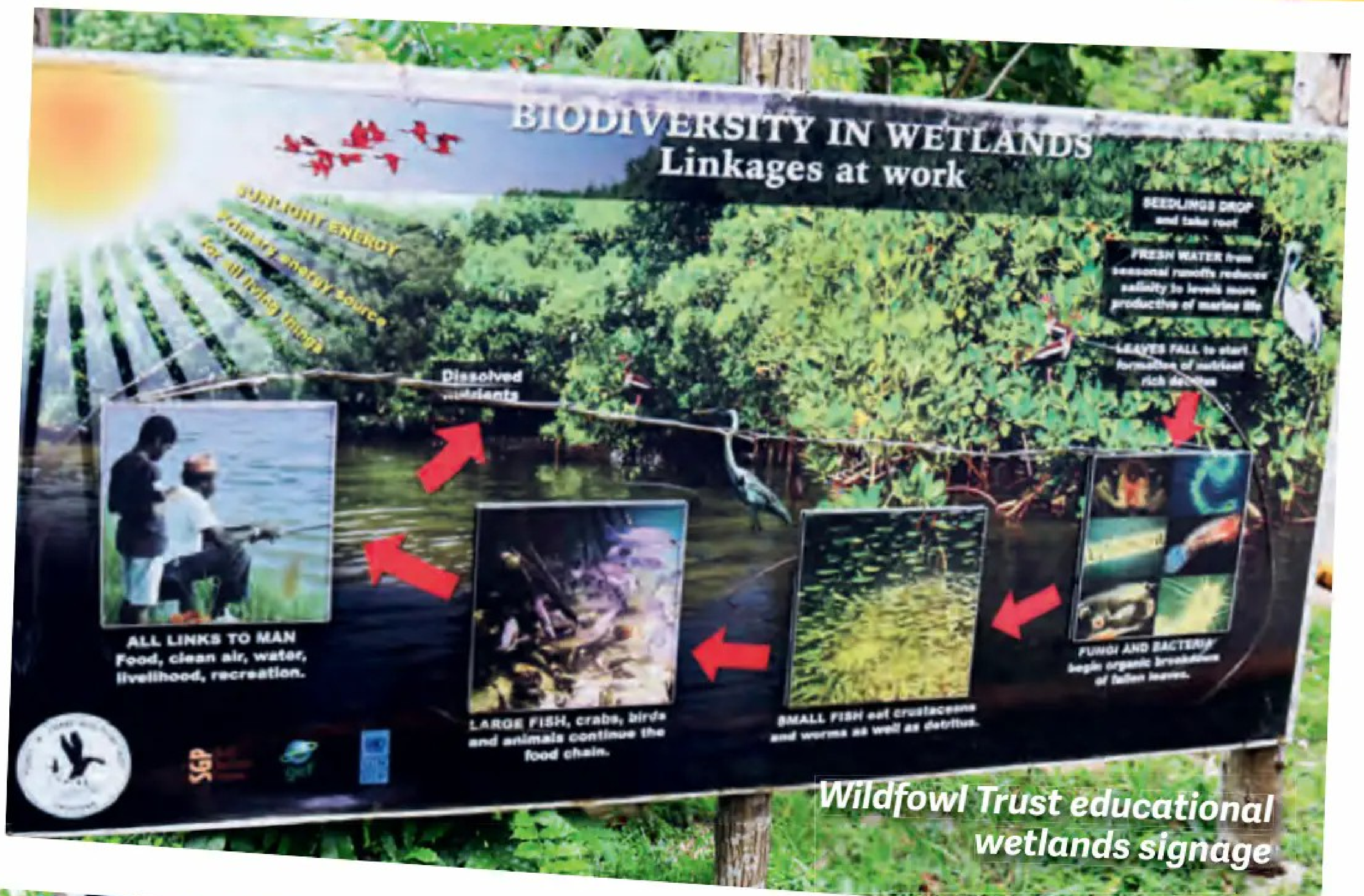


Brown Violetear at Yeretté

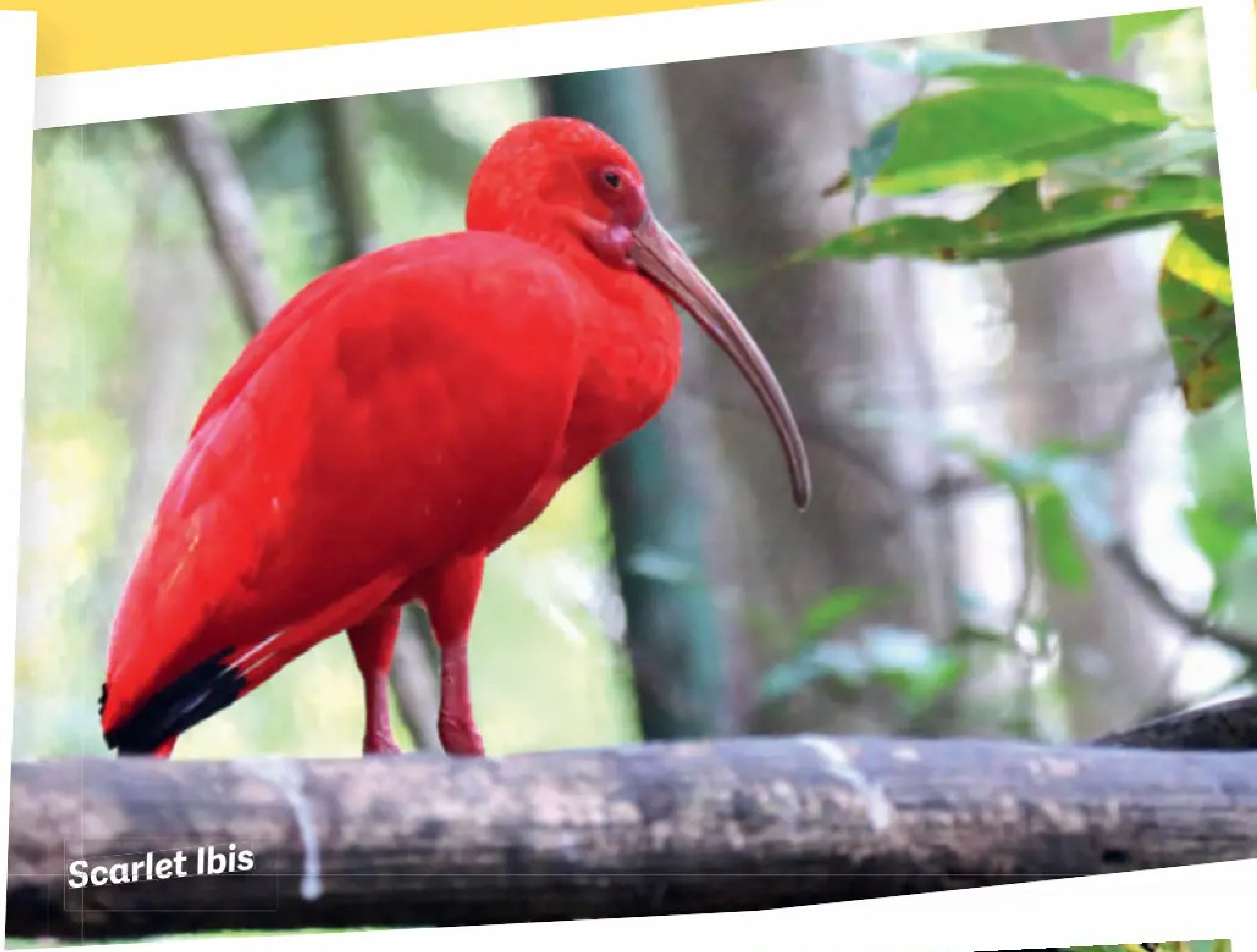


White-chested Emerald

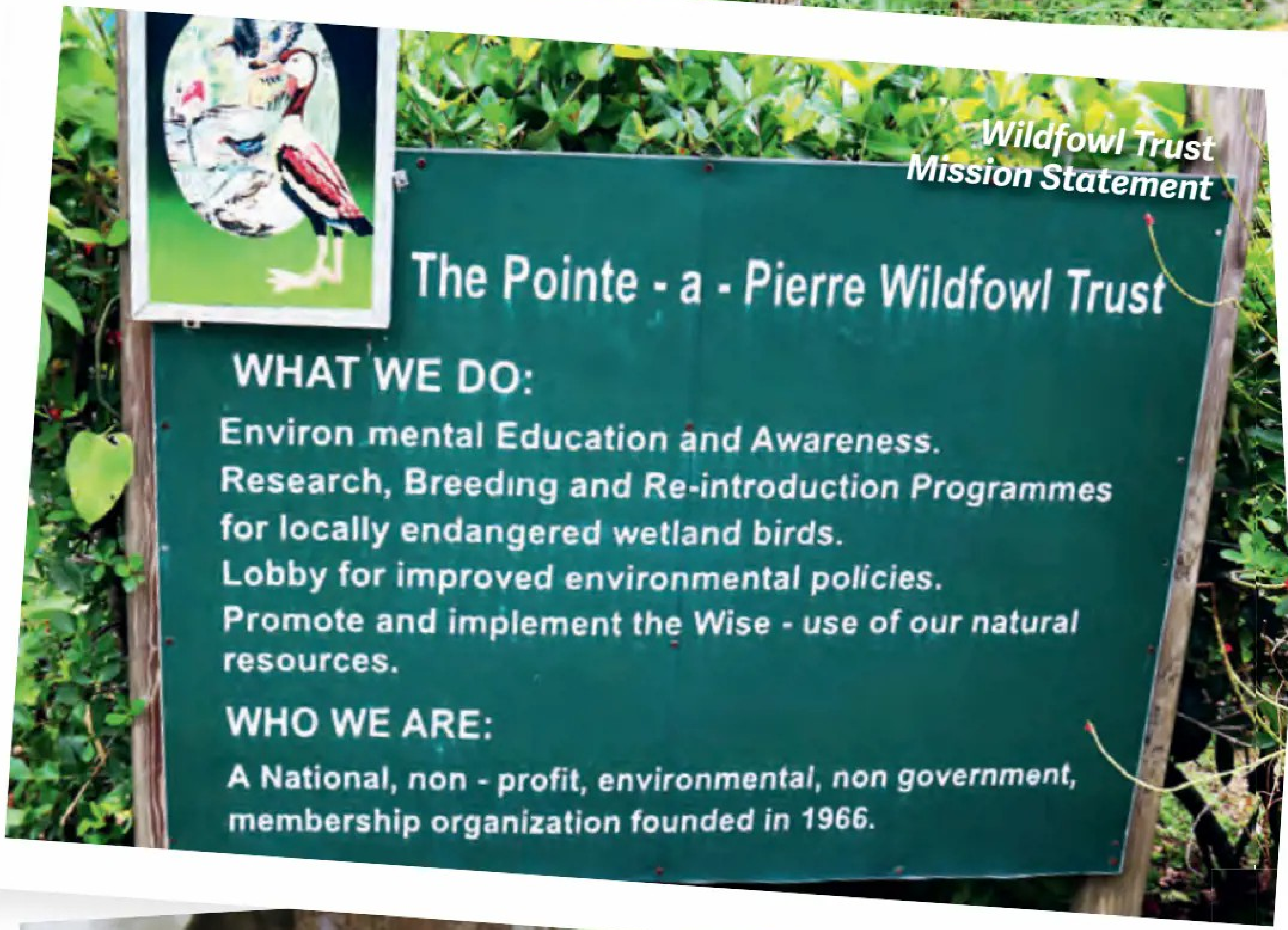
Hummingbird Feeders in the Garden at Yeretté


BIODIVERSITY IN WETLANDS
Linkages at work
SUNLIGHT ENERGY
Primary energy source
for all living things
Dissolved nutrients
SEEDLINGS DROP and take root
FRESH WATER from seasonal runoffs reduces salinity to levels more productive of marine life
LEAVES FALL to start formation of nutrient rich detritus
ALL LINKS TO MAN Food, clean air, water, livelihood, recreation.
LARGE FISH, crabs, birds and animals continue the food chain.
SMALL FISH eat crustaceans and worms as well as detritus.
FUNGI AND BACTERIA begin organic breakdown of fallen leaves.
SGP

Wildfowl Trust educational wetlands signage



Scarlet Ibis



Wildfowl Trust Mission Statement

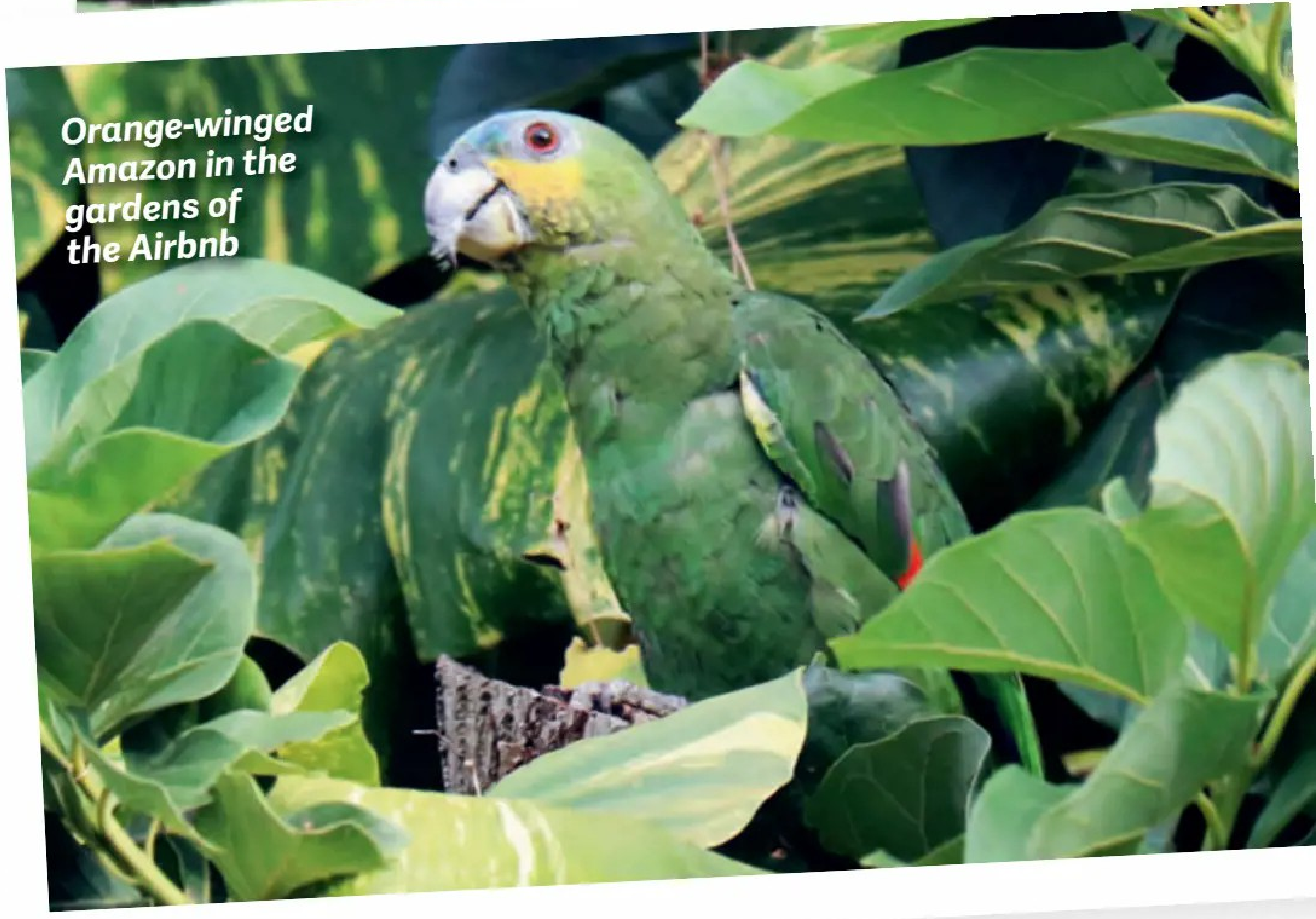
The Pointe - a - Pierre Wildfowl Trust

WHAT WE DO:

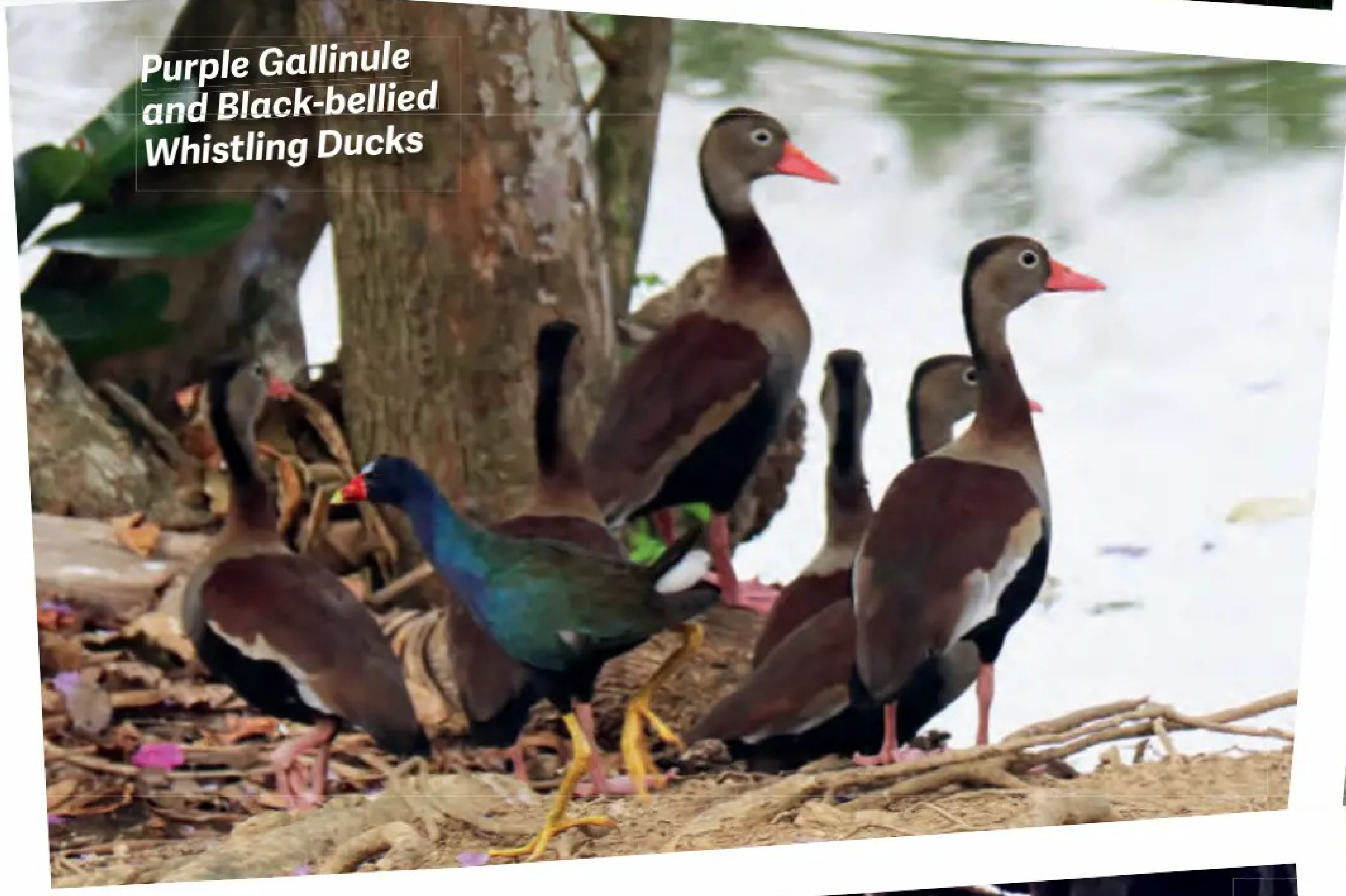
Environ mental Education and Awareness.
Research, Breeding and Re-introduction Programmes for locally endangered wetland birds.
Lobby for improved environmental policies.
Promote and implement the Wise - use of our natural resources.

WHO WE ARE:

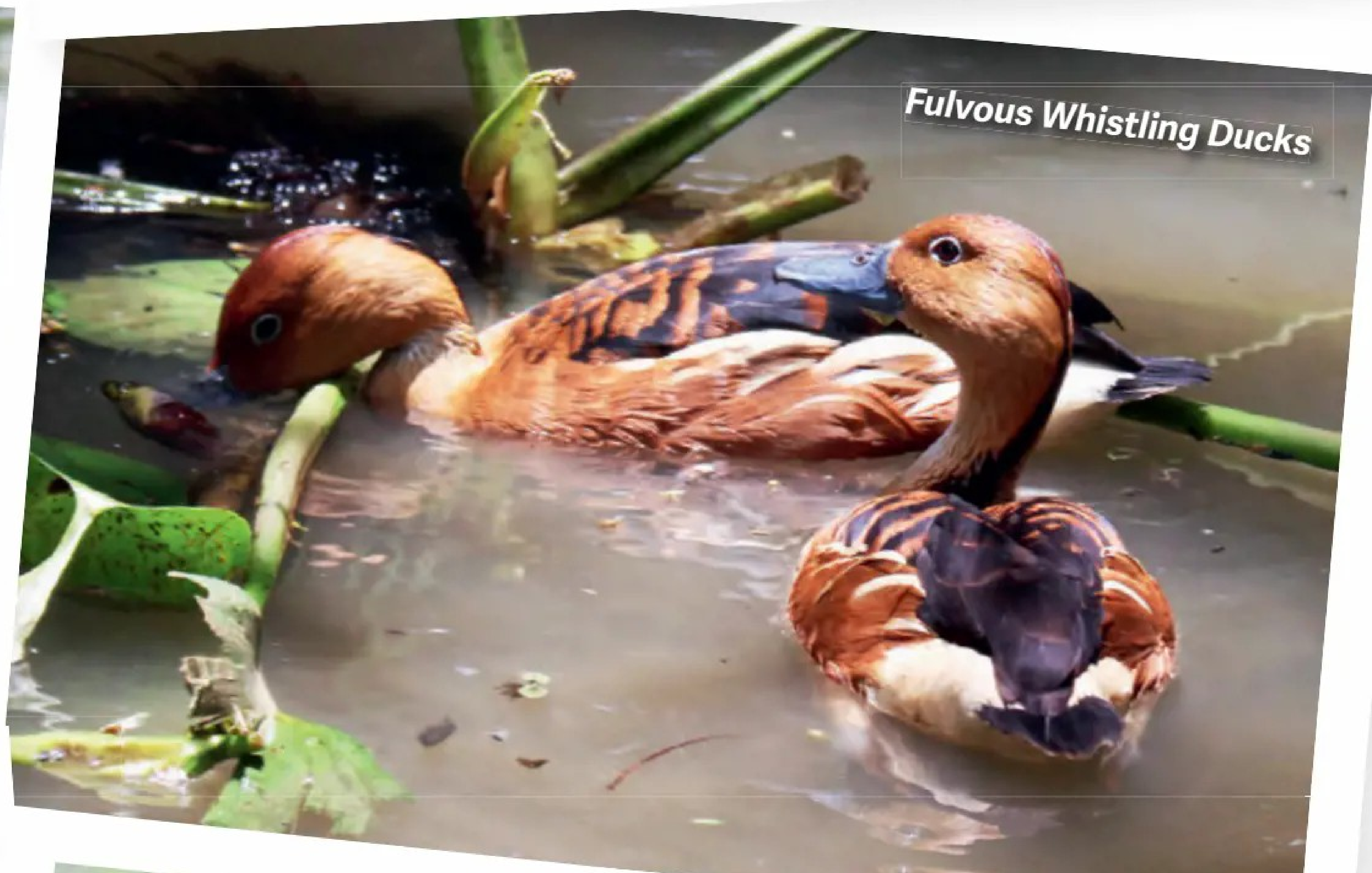
A National, non - profit, environmental, non government, membership organization founded in 1966.



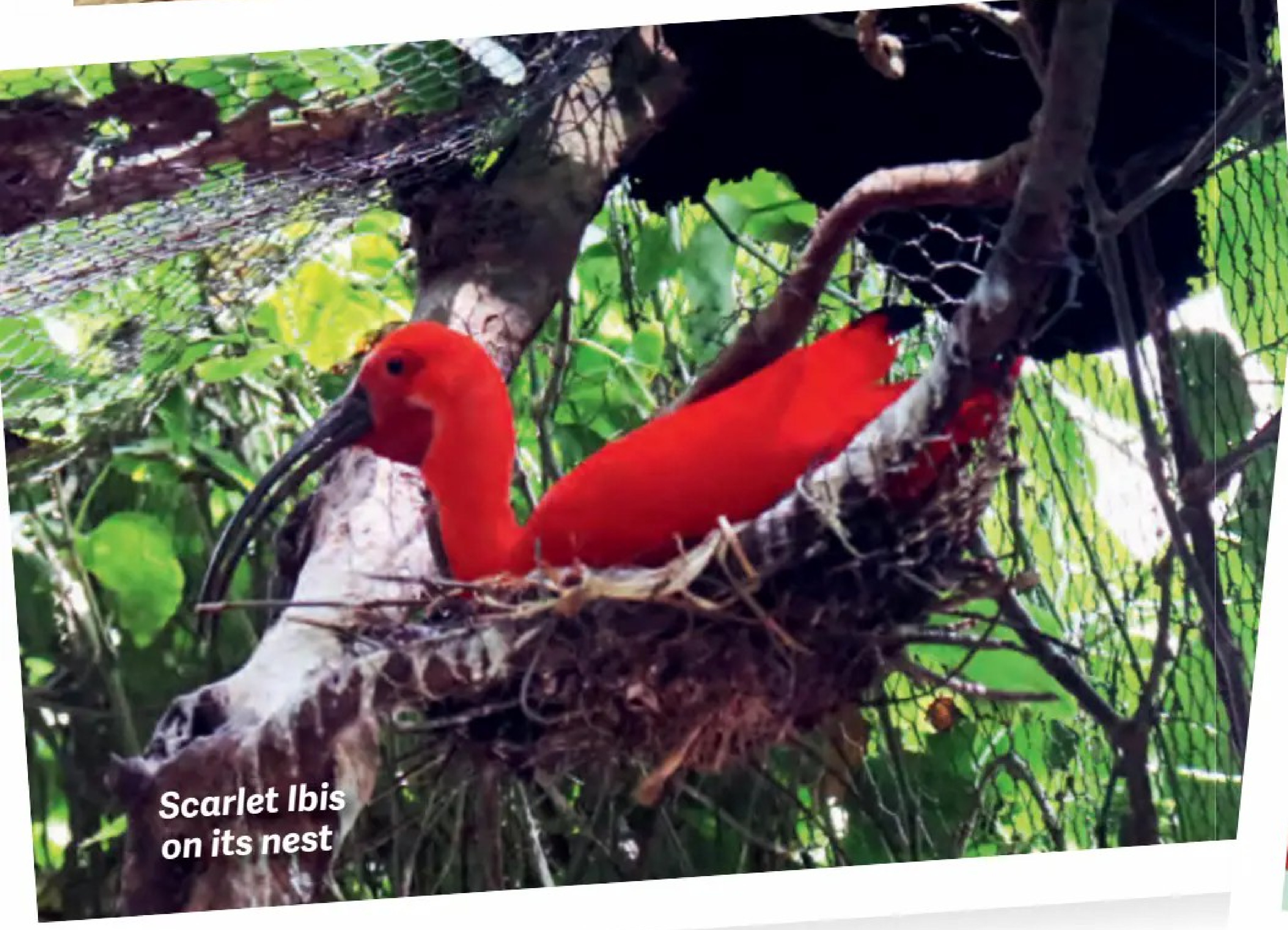
Orange-winged Amazon in the gardens of the Airbnb



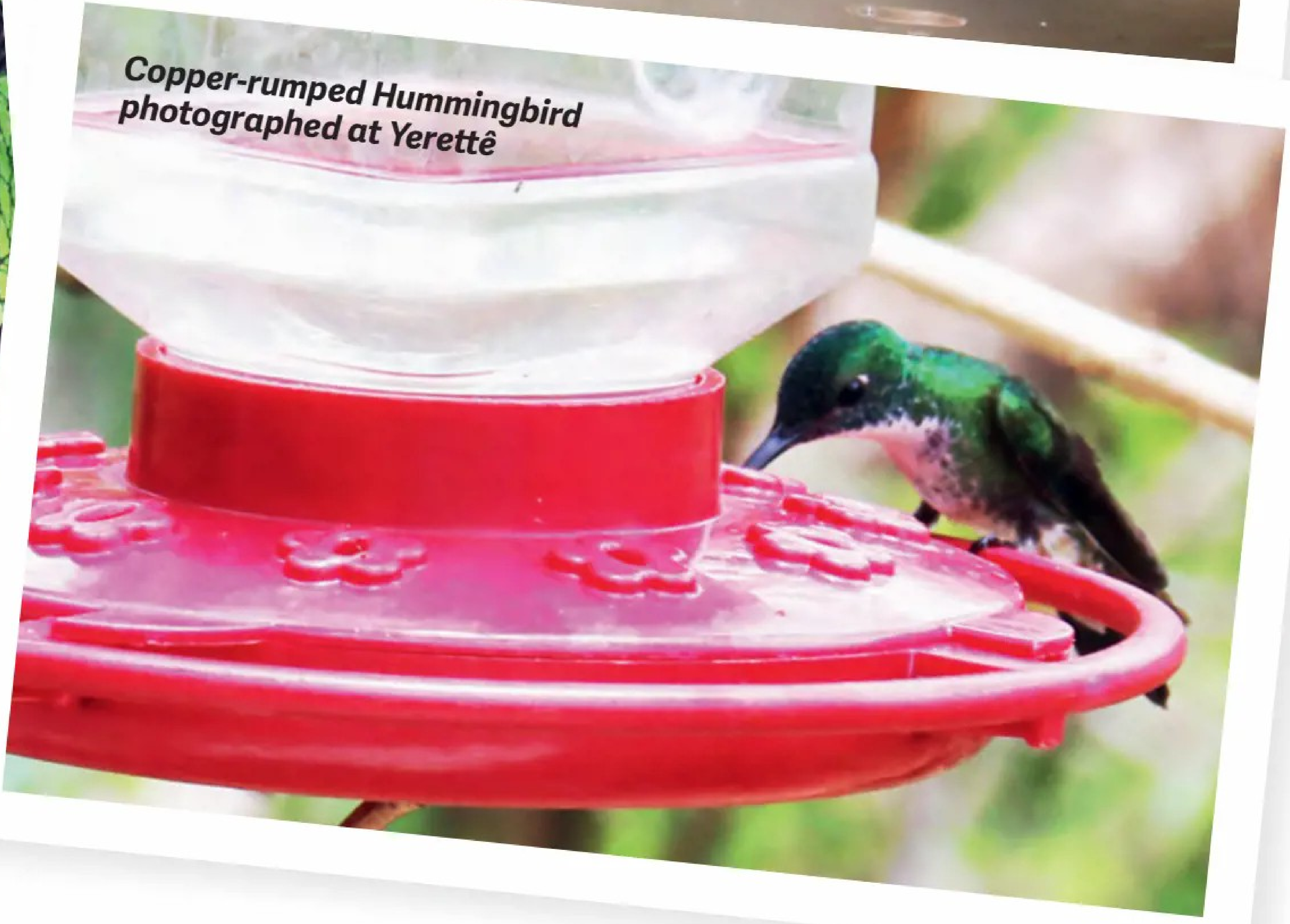
Purple Gallinule and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks



Fulvous Whistling Ducks



Scarlet Ibis on its nest



Copper-rumped Hummingbird photographed at Yerettê

territorial aggression, these antagonistic stunners are the combatants of the yard. Chasing away all adversaries with their fiery personalities.

YERETTÊ, HOME OF THE HUMMINGBIRD

They are also the star attraction at ***Yerettê, Home of the Hummingbird***, located in Maracas Valley, in the Northern Range. The 'brainchild' of Theo and Gloria Ferguson, the sanctuary showcases up to 15 of the 18 hummingbird species on the island. "All are wild, not pets. The birds run with the rhythm of nature. Every month we have hummingbirds," notes Theo. "Sometimes hundreds. Sometimes thousands. We are content with whatever nature brings us."

Named after the Amerindian word for hummingbird (*iërette*), the refuge seeks to immerse visitors in the 'magic' surrounding these mystical birds. Found only in the Americas, from Chile's *Tierra del Fuego* to south-central Alaska, these 'hummers' play a prominent role in local folklore. Long before Christopher Columbus sailed for the Spanish Crown and christened this land *Isla de la Trinidad* (Island of the Trinity), the indigenous Arawaks and Caribs had already tagged the island as *Iëre*. From the Kalinago language, meaning 'Land of the Hummingbird'. Where, in the same tradition as the Mayas of Mexico, these 'sacred pollinators' were viewed as the 'souls of their ancestors'. The Taino Indians even considered hummingbirds as 'disseminators of all new life'. And, interestingly, their term *'Colibri'*, though sometimes spelt slightly differently, has been accepted in almost every European nation as the generic name for this second-largest family of birds.

Theo laughs as a White-chested Emerald *Chrysuronia brevirostris* whizzes past, close enough to reveal layers upon layers of shimmering, teal-shaded feathers. Arranged like iridescent sequins across the nape of its neck and head. Truly, a 'living jewel'. Hummingbirds occur in all colours of the spectrum. Metallic and glittering, their tincture comes courtesy of sunlight reflection, rather than actual pigmentation.

"You're being exposed to one of nature's greatest therapeutic energies. Above what you see and hear. These birds calm you. They take away your stress. They can help release your 'creative' potential," Ferguson adds. "People come to ***Yerettê*** to get immersed in the vitality of the hummingbird. It's called 'energy medicine'."

Before he can continue, our tour guide, Stephen Broadbridge, interrupts. "I just heard a Channel-billed Toucan *Ramphastos vitellinus*. More than one, actually. I heard chatter from over there…" he points, "And over here." On cue, a pair of handsome Neotropical specimens briefly leave the security of the canopy and spiral into the neighbouring forest. Bare blue eye patches and beak bases, lemon-yellow bellies over a white throat, all set against inky-black plumage and what resembles a scarlet 'cummerbund' – the only toucan species on the West Indies Isle.

After this unexpected, but marvellous, diversion, we return to the ***Yerettê*** patio, brimming with hummingbird feeders and bewitching flowers. A lady Black-throated Mango *Anthracothorax nigricollis* settles on the feeder, the jagged ebony stripe running from her throat down her pale tummy, clearly visible. Another female, a Blue-chinned Sapphire *Chlorestes notata* with a speckled chest, flutters past a ruby-red bottle brush spike to land on a croton. "Believe it or not, hummingbirds perch up to 80% of the time," Theo confides.

But when they are not tranquilly resting on a tree limb, they are airborne – at sustained flight speeds up to 53kph (33mph) and diving up to 96.5khp (60mph), with wing-flaps approximating 60-100 times per second. Never underestimate these tiny birds, including the smallest species on the planet (the teensiest weighing a mere 2 grams (.07oz.)). "They are the most powerful biological engines on Earth," Ferguson explains. "They are also the only birds that can 'hover' on their own energy." Capable of flying backwards, sideways, upside down, even vertical. "They are the original 'fighter jets' of the world," Theo says, in amazement. "Most are acrobatic." The result of practically 42 million years of evolution.

I stare across the property, in the direction of a 170-year-old silk cotton tree. Its prodigious trunk and mammoth branches cast a shadow over the ***Yerettê*** garden. A bee buzzes across a hibiscus flower, a White-necked Jacobin *Florisuga mellivora* hot on its wing. With its polychromatic palette of deep blue (his hood and chest), green upperparts, white collar and most of his tail, the male hummingbird creates a hologram of kaleidoscopic colour. Nonplussed, he races towards a heliconia blossom.

"I wish I had their metabolism," I snicker, eyeing a Ruby Topaz *Chrysolampis mosquitus* just returning from a monkey pod tree. A metabolism requiring 15,000 calories per day.

To maintain such an elevated caloric intake, these beauties have to eat every 10-15 minutes. "The majority of their life is spent in a struggle to survive and find enough food. They are constantly hungry; ergo, they are always angry," concludes Theo. Indeed, the birds often spar amongst themselves, fighting the competition for the available food supply. "They have been known to spear one another with their bills when it becomes extremely physical."

Gustavo and I have witnessed this phenomenon before – in Ecuador. But here, in Theo and Gloria's floral paradise, there's plenty of flowery sap and sugar water to go around. At 13 licks per second from its rather short beak, the Ruby Topaz draws the sweet ambrosia from the feeder in a whirlwind of ever-mobile flickers of colouration… Golden throat, raspberry crown, orange tail…together, scintillating brilliantly in the sunshine. *Tliiii…tliii…tliii*, the hummingbird chirps. Momentarily satiated.

POINTE-À-PIERRE WILDFOWL TRUST

From ***Yerettê***, it's southward to another spectacular Trinidadian manmade attraction – the ***Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust***. We trade the dynamic 'hustle-and-bustle' of the h'bird realm for the peaceful quiet of a lush wetland oasis. Royal poincianas surround the main breeding lake, their candy-apple-red flowers seesawing in the wind. Like minuscule sparkles of flame, the blossoms of these flamboyant trees are mirrored by the water's surface and deflected back onto a clear, blue sky. With the onset of the island's wet season, Pride of India arbours have begun to burgeon. Flaunting lavender blooms. Adding to the allure, carmine skimmer dragonflies careen amongst the copious waterlilies that dapple the reservoir. Motorized pinkish-purple mosquito eaters.

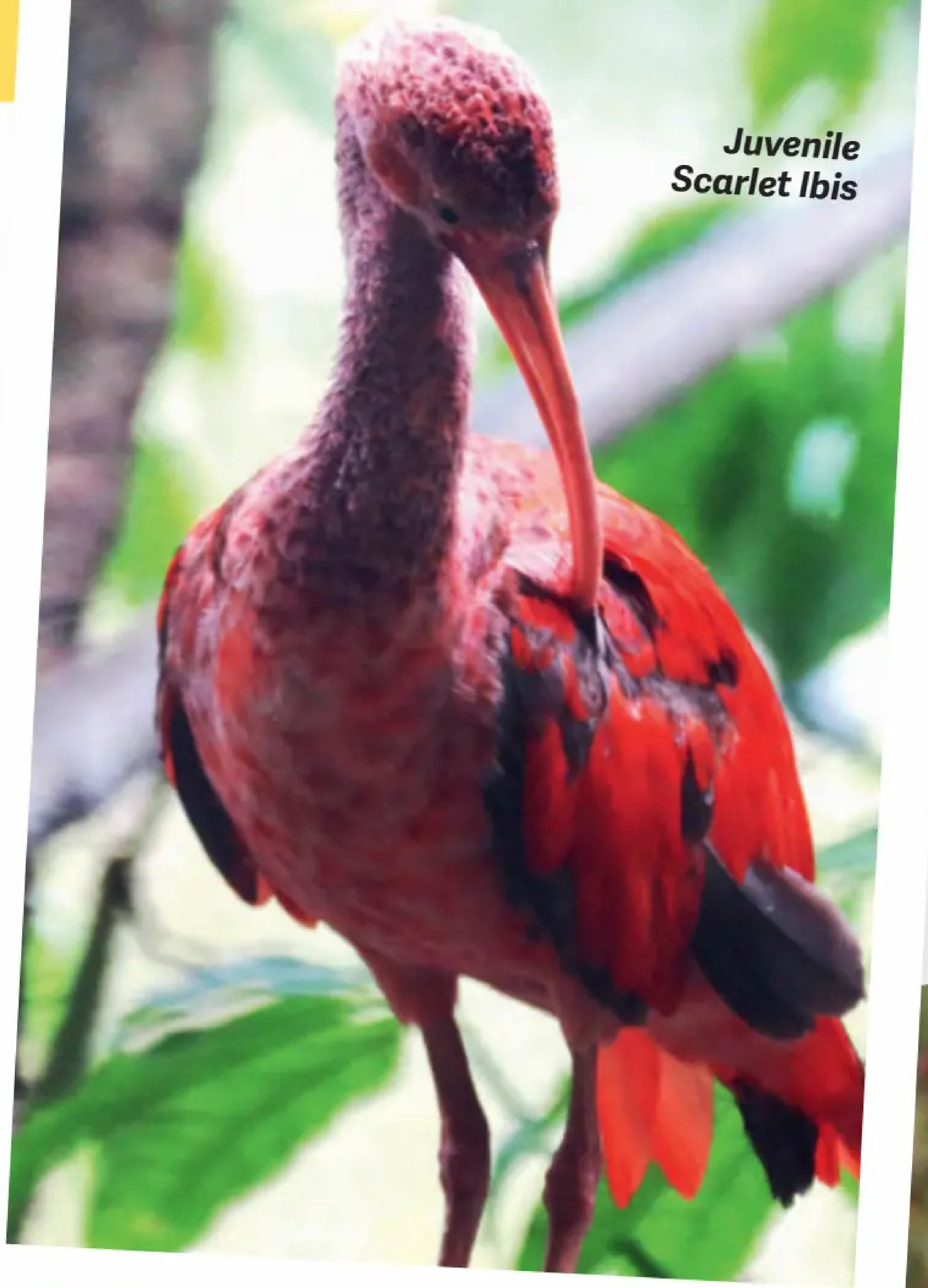
The Wildfowl Trust – an 89-acre (36-hectare) ersatz oasis – sits within the once extremely productive, state-owned ***Petrotrin Oil*** refinery compound. In the beating heart of the Trini industrial belt. It is the only conservation/breeding centre in the universe located within a hydrocarbon, fossil-fuel zone. Despite the factory's shut-down in late 2018 – without sufficient available liquid petroleum from company resources, the plant was forced to rely too heavily on imported crude – ***Heritage Petroleum*** and ***Paria Fuel and Trading*** still conduct exploration for new oil sources and handle shipment transactions.

"The uniqueness of ***The Trust***'s location within a major petrochemical complex is a powerful statement of mutual respect," espouses Molly Gaskin, current President of the ***Wildfowl Trust***. "It is an example to the rest of the world that industry and business and a bona fide environmental NGO (non-governmental organization) with integrity can, with cooperation, understanding, and awareness of mutual values, work together."

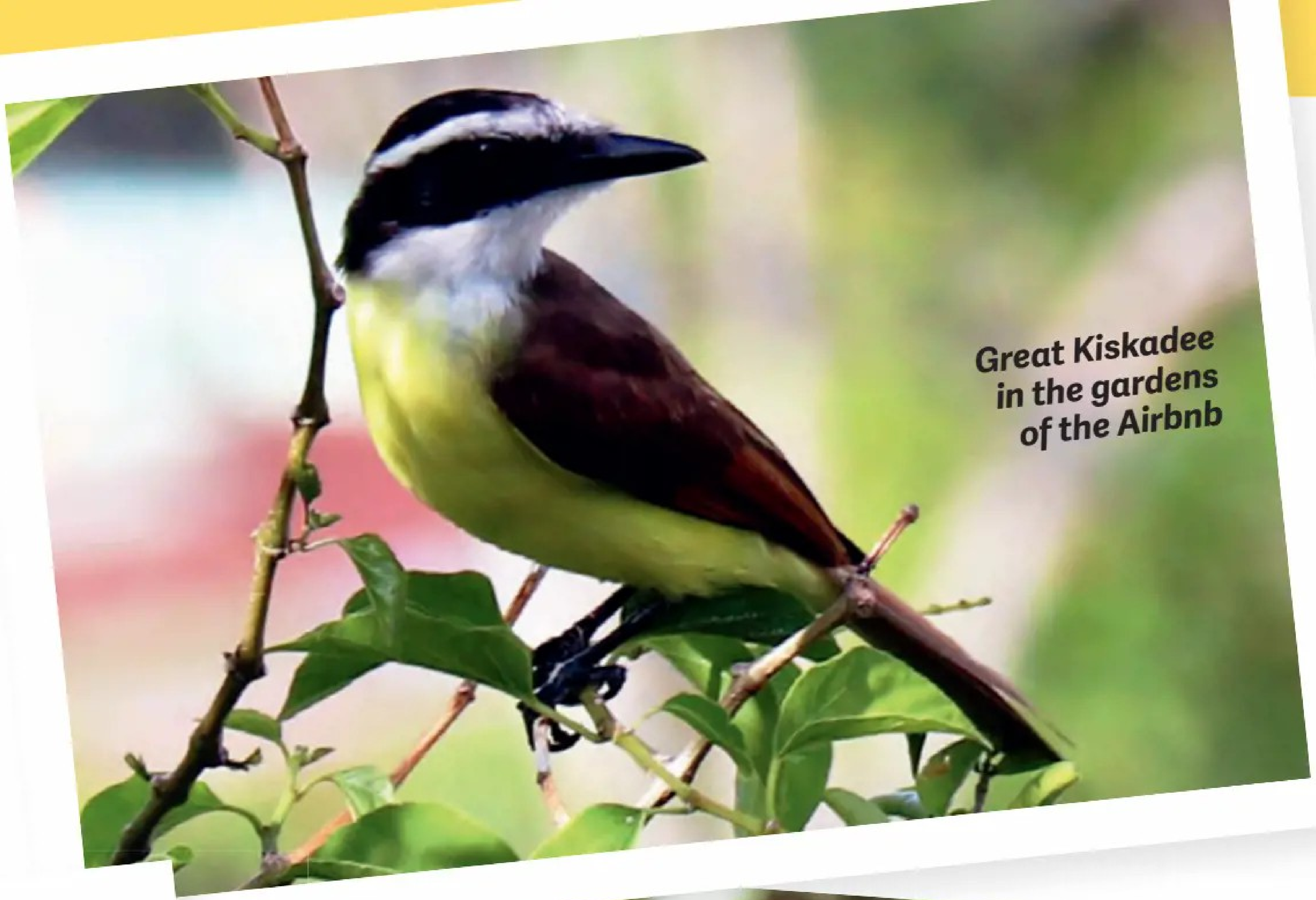
Gustavo and I saunter past the primary reservoir, stippled with water hyacinths and exquisite lotuses. So many, in fact, according to Education Officer, Wes Goorachan, that "We have to purge some of the plants once a week in order to NOT choke out the oxygen from the lake." Pacu, cichlids, and guabine (wild guppies) navigate the 10.67m (35ft) depths, while water striders skirr the surface.

An unexpected flurry of activity distracts us. An indigo-tinted Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica* scuttles past in a hurry, its yellow legs scattering the leaf litter. A Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, unperturbed by the rail's haste, ushers her brood of adorably fluffy chicks into the pond. Guiding them across the lily pads, while mingling with the floating blooms.

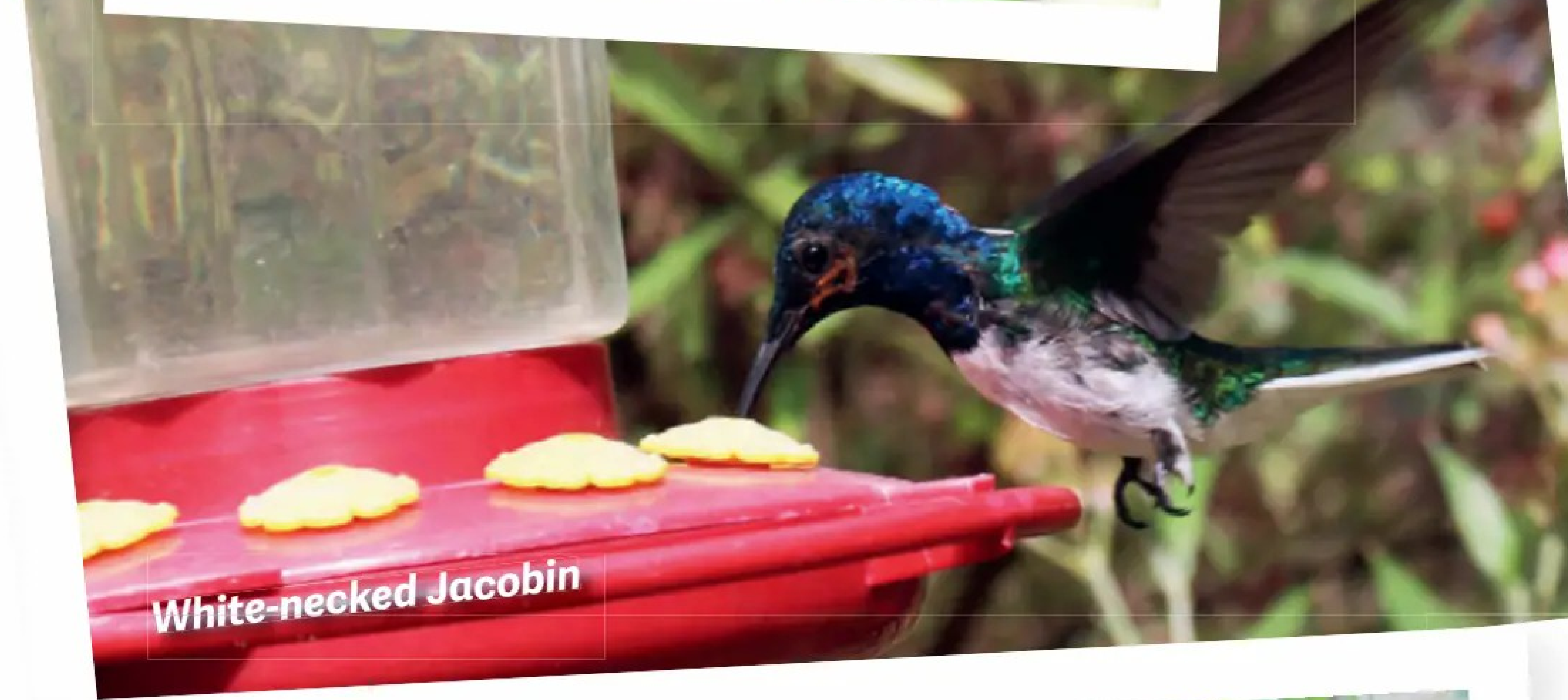
Further away, an *Anhinga Anhinga* anhinga straddles a tree branch to dry its wing coverts. Currents of humid air tousle the raven feathers lining its long, twisting neck. Even as the snakebird soaks up some rays on a 'bread-and-cheese' flowering shrub, it keeps a wary eye out for one of its favourite snacks – baby caimans. Also, inhabitants of the lake, these alligatorids were intentionally



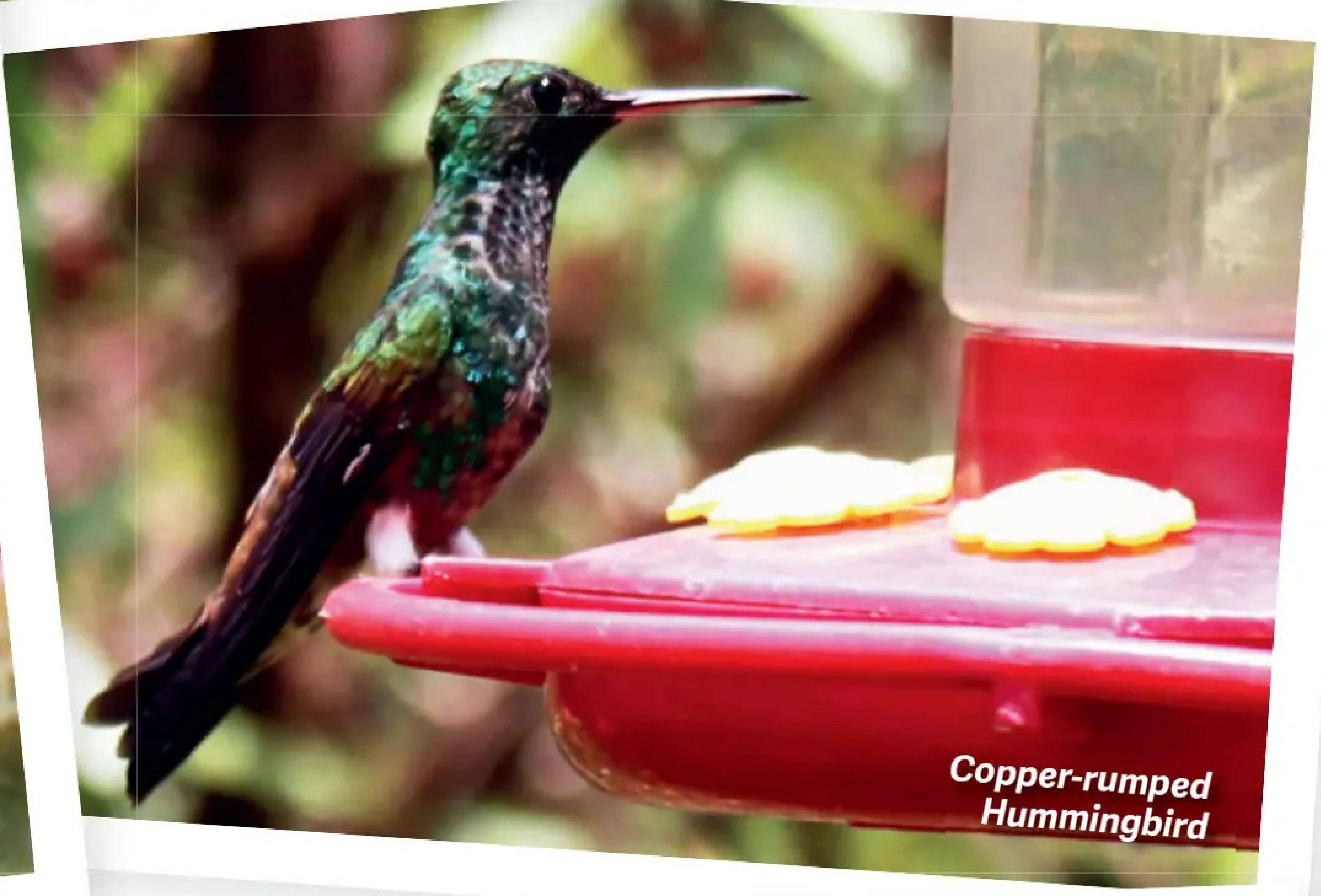
Juvenile Scarlet Ibis



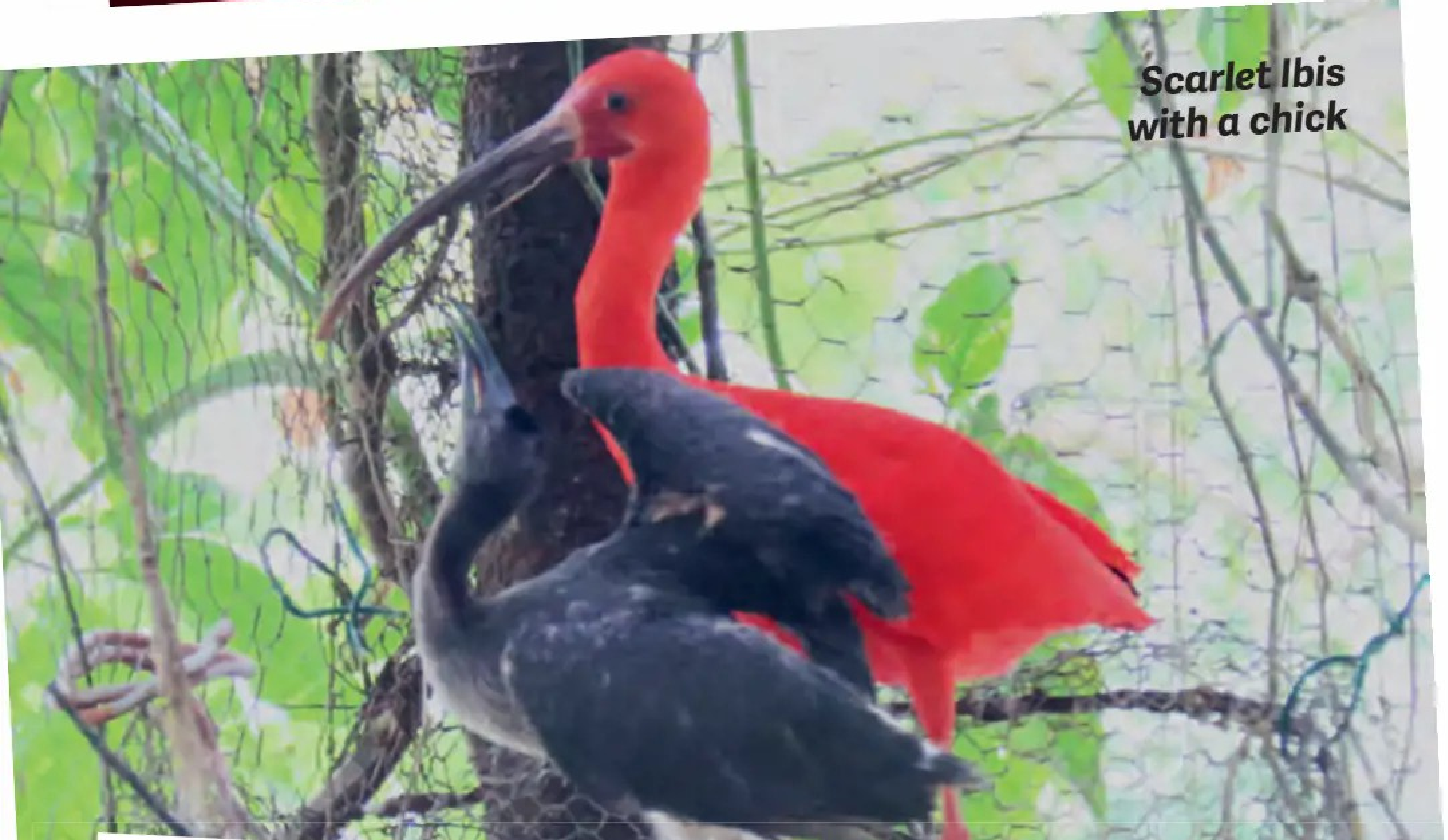
Great Kiskadee in the gardens of the Airbnb



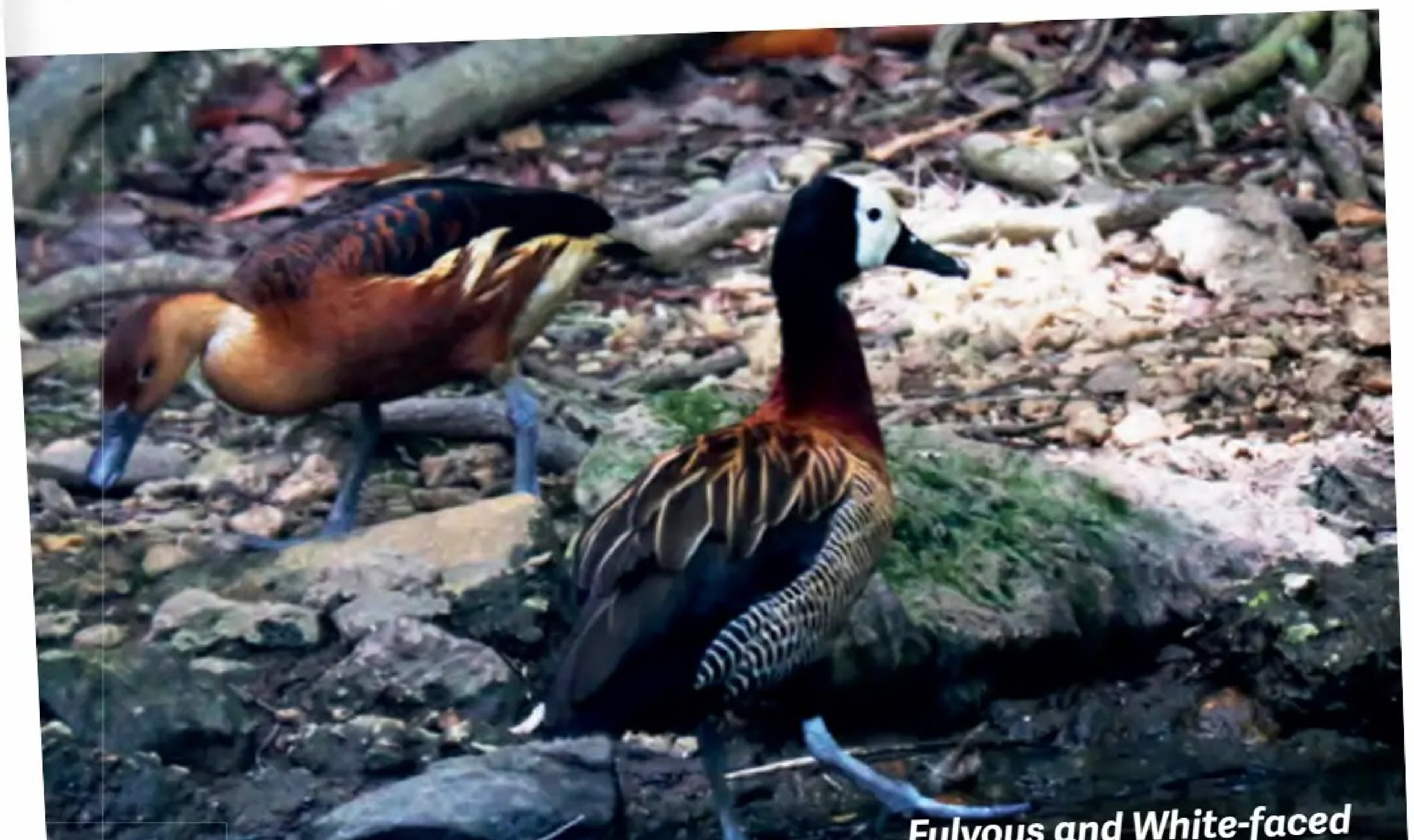
White-necked Jacobin



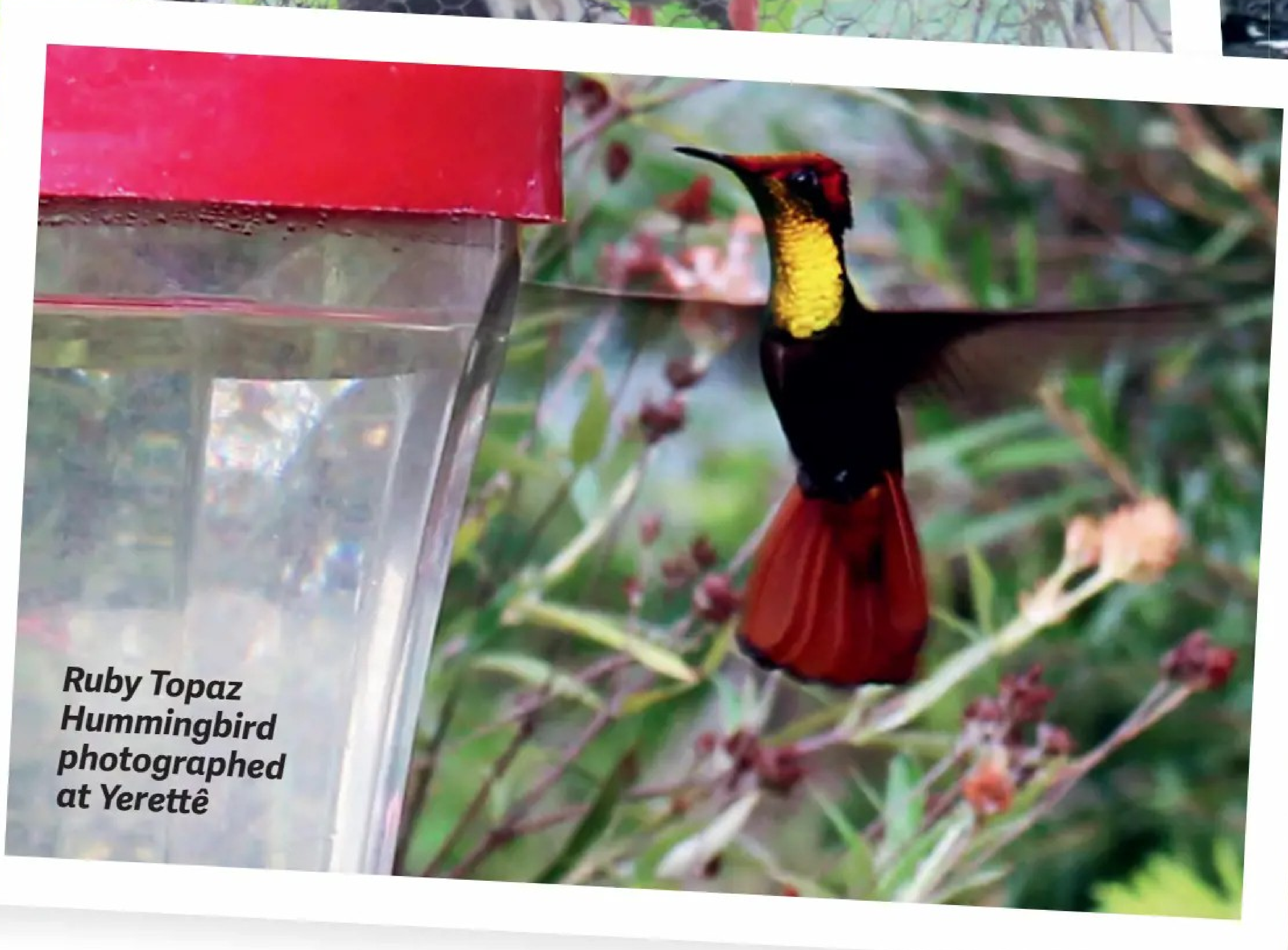
Copper-rumped Hummingbird



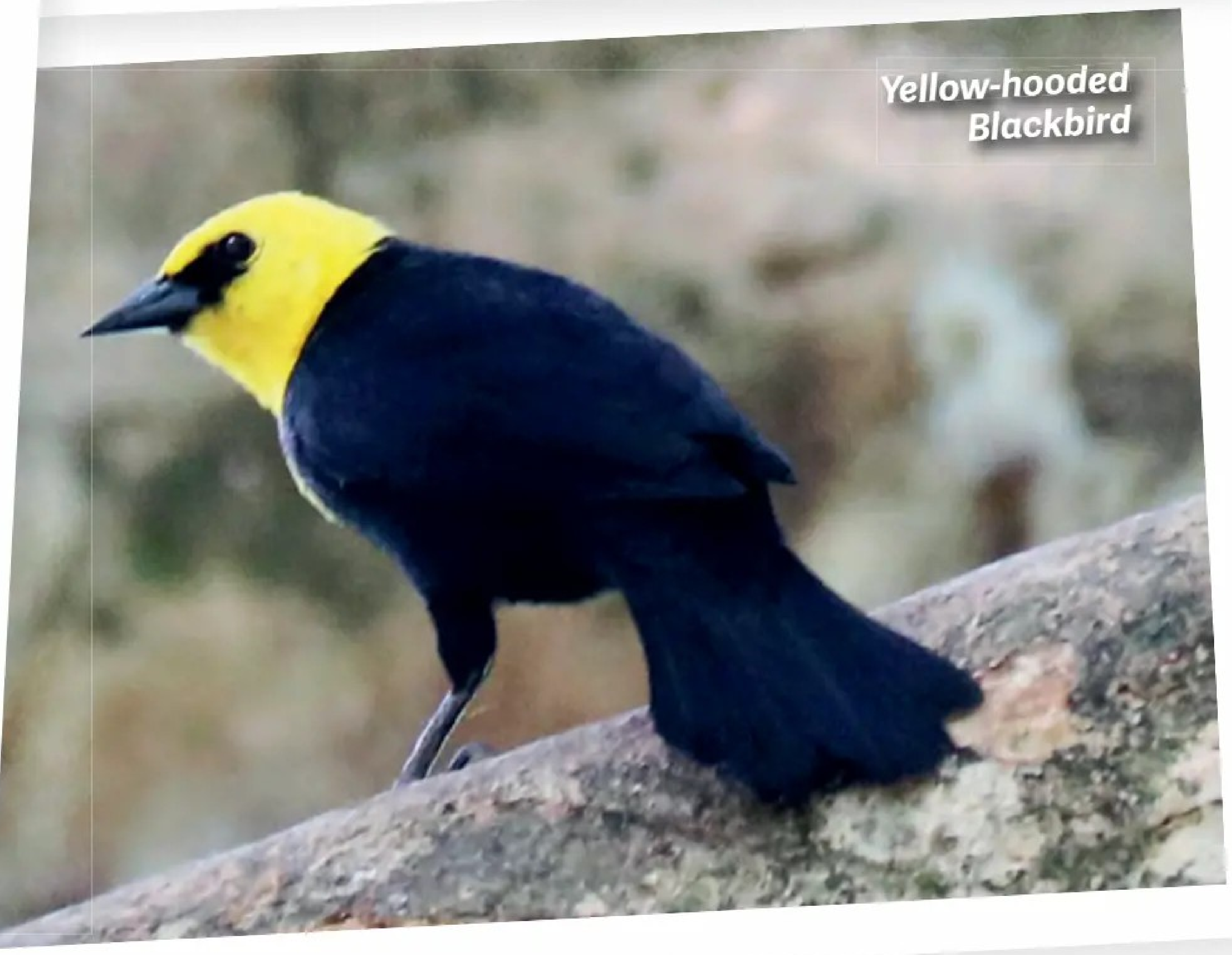
Scarlet Ibis with a chick



Fulvous and White-faced Whistling Ducks



Ruby Topaz Hummingbird photographed at Yerettê



Yellow-hooded Blackbird

introduced to this biome. A stark reminder to the lackadaisical waterfowl of just what savagery exists in 'real life', beyond the safety of ***The Trust***'s borders.

Yet, I don't see any signs of trepidation from the avian residents. The Black-bellied Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna autumnalis*, especially, being the primary population of this environment, frolic without angst amongst the grasses. Known to be quite the 'social butterflies', though rarely quacking in our presence, they are oddly accommodating for our cameras. Striking pose after pose on tree boughs close to their nesting boxes. Or lining the railings of the charming bridges that flank the reservoir. Frivolous, these beautiful 'divers' flash their ostentatious pink bills and brown-black plumage, along with their devil-may-care attitudes.

We strolled past a series of aviaries, housing different species of macaws. Green-winged *Ara chloropterus*, a single Scarlet *Ara macao*, that probably originated from the pet trade, since not a Trinidad native, and Red-bellied *Orthopsittica manilatus*. "We breed 'sensitive' species of birds on site," explains Wes. "At one time, there were less than 20 Blue-and-yellow Macaws *Ara ararauna* (in the country). Now, they are plentiful." Birds bred here in captivity are relocated to their natural habitats. Thus far, 25 of these turquoise-and-gold-coloured parrots have been re-introduced into the ***Nariva Wetlands***: 10 adults in 2011 into the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary, and 15 in 2020, into the surrounding Pointe-à-Pierre territory.

Despite stringent propagation protocols in place – no dogs, cats or rats allowed within ***The Trust*** area – there are still threats to wildlife. While Molly Gaskins worked with the *Ramsar Convention* to protect the ***Nariva Swamp***'s biodiverse ecosystem, feral hounds virtually eradicated two duck species – the White-faced Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna viduata* and the White-cheeked Pintails *Anas Bahamensis*, almost to the point of extinction on the island.

"There has been a tremendous loss of wetland habitats due to inappropriate land-use practices and so-called development," Molly laments. "Species have disappeared due to overhunting. Can you imagine that waterfowl are currently legally hunted before the youngsters are fully adult?" Whereas other birds are mostly safeguarded nationwide, wildfowl – ducks, geese, and swans – are not. Traditionally, Trinidadians have always coveted these *Anseriformes* for their meat.

Here, at the Trust, it is a TTD 50,000 (AUD 11,090) fine to kill these aquatic birds. Originally, in 1961, when Richard Dean, a local hunter who worked for Petrotrin, founded ***The Wildfowl Trust***, it was with the idea of breeding more ducks, for continued hunting and sport. He realised the number of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks was dwindling in the wild. Initially granted a mere 3-acre (1.21ha) tract, environmentalist Molly Gaskins converted the parcel into a conservation centre, the first breeding centre of its kind on the island. The non-profit organisation was officially established in 1966, with the same mission almost six decades ago as nowadays – to educate the public on the value of natural landscapes and species diversity.

We continue roaming the grounds, amused by a half-dozen Red-eared Slider Turtles proliferating across a fallen stump. Yellow-hooded Blackbirds *Chrysomus icterocephalus* crouch behind a Hawaiian torch ginger tree, almost obscured. Bats flap along the water's edge, rustling the lotus plants, whose leaves are used to make the trademark callaloo soup. Nonchalant, a wild Muscovy *Cairina moschata* naps in the reeds, the drake impervious to the raucous nature around him.

Beyond the 'Devil's Ear' – Guanacaste – trees, and the trail that bears their name, more breeding enclosures await. Bristling with the 'quacks' and 'chirps' of procreating fowl. Considered rare and vulnerable in Trinidad, the White-cheeked Pintails are not on display, but they are certainly part of ***The Trust***'s avicultural re-introduction program.

In conjunction with the caramel-and-butterscotch-coloured Fulvous Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna bicolor*, an overhunted species across the island. These marsh-waders bond so strongly with their mates that they remain single for the rest of their days when one of the pair dies. Around 700 of these 'lookers' have been released back into the wild.

Another success story involves the White-faced Whistling Ducks. Expunged locally long before Trinbagonians declared their independence from Britain, the birds currently flourish under the careful monitoring of ***The Trust***'s staff. Especially immediately following their breeding season, when they begin an 18-25 day moult and become flightless. Making them literally 'sitting ducks' for predation.

Lastly, we approach an enormous aviary, where ***The Wildfowl Trust*** offers visitors the only opportunity to get up close to the national bird, the Scarlet Ibis *Eudocimus ruber*. A number of these waders, in shades rivalling a Ferrari sports car, wander inside the enclosure. A mother nuzzles her fledgling, a bundle of greyish-brown flocculence. Another 'mum' squats over her nest, warming a few bluish-green eggs. Juveniles – in varying hues of red – unwittingly plunge their curved beaks into the water, in search of crustaceans.

Initially hatching its first chick – in captivity – in 1991, ***The Trust*** has bred 105 birds, with 78 of the ibises returned to their natural habitat. Gaskin says it best, "If you can educate people on the value of what is being done, you can encourage change. Everything we do is for the future generations." With 80+ bird species thriving in its wetland, the ***Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust*** is certainly doing something right.

CONCLUSION

Back at our Airbnb, from the balcony, I spy a cautiously shy agouti venturing into the garden from behind a towering banana tree. Unfazed by the prattle of parrots and the comings and goings of hummingbirds. Here in Trinidad, man and nature happily co-exist.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Stay tuned for the second part of this insightful article in Volume 37 Issue 7.

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BIRDS IN Education

AUTHOR & PHOTOS
DAVID PACE

Birds within the education curriculum creates 'Bird Literacy'. Instilling a set of values and skills in protecting not only birds but biodiversity in general. Here a Scotch College Year 4 student releases a White-plumed Honeyeater during the bird banding experience in which students worked alongside Ornithologists.

SHARING our avian passion with the younger generation is something that is vital, ensuring that we have future custodians to protect not only birdlife but also ensure we maintain and improve the biodiversity of our world.

BIRDS IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

As a teacher with several decades of experience, I have been in a privileged position of fostering the love of birds, and biodiversity in general, through the programs embedded within the school curriculum. Over the years I have been able to foster interest in aviculture by establishing both small and large walk-through aviaries that have housed various parrots, quail, finches and softbills. Aviculture in schools has been an ideal vehicle for generating interest in birds while also establishing opportunities for students to gain animal-keeping experience and experience in breeding various species.

LEARNING ABOUT DEMOCRACY THROUGH BIRDS – 'COCKATOO ISLAND'

At Scotch College in Adelaide, the school curriculum has a strong bird focus. In Year 4, students do a Humanities unit entitled, 'Cockatoo Island'. The unit primarily explores democracy, in particular Local and Federal Government. This is achieved using birds. Let me explain briefly how it works.

Each student is allocated a bird species, for example, the Plains Wanderer. The students complete a realistic, detailed portrait of the bird, as we explore the history and important role of Natural History illustration prior to the invention of the camera.

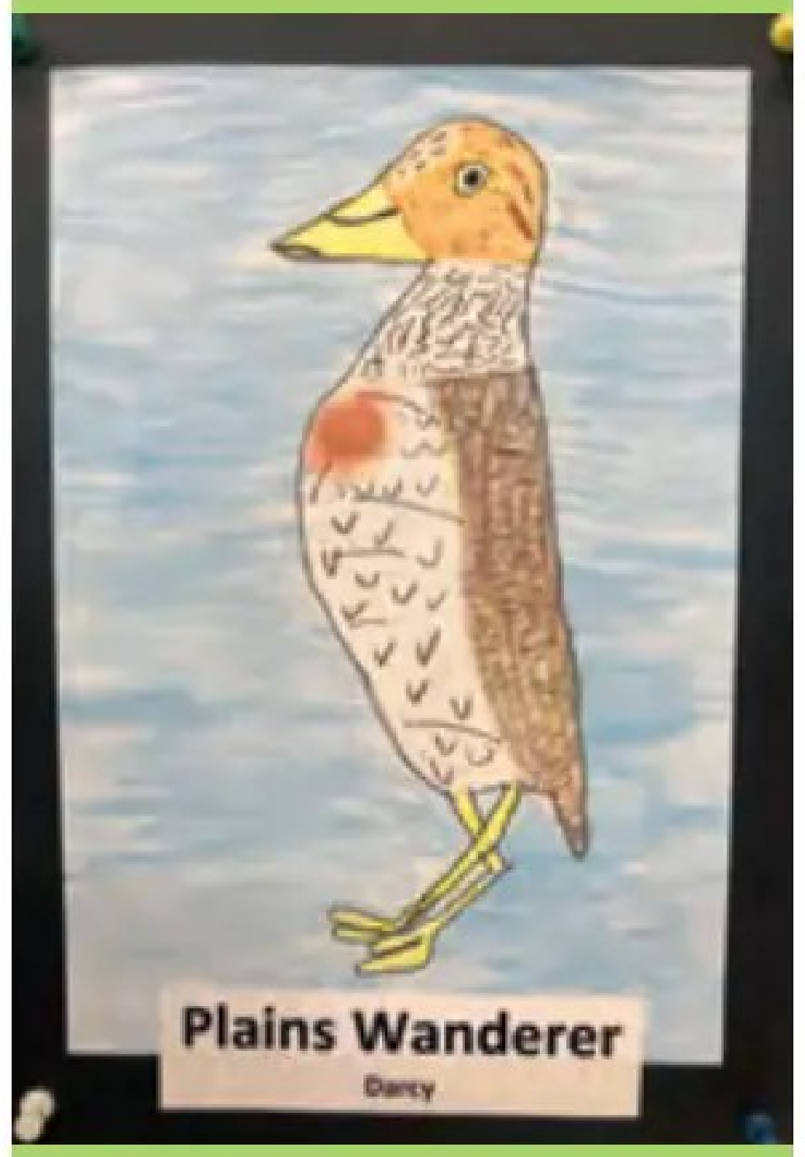
Students then research their bird, its breeding habits, distribution, conservation status and habitat. In the case of a Plains Wanderer, they soon discover that it is a nocturnal, ground-dwelling species that requires grassland habitats. They also discover that they are listed as an endangered species and are being bred as part of a captive conservation program by Zoos SA and Zoos Victoria.

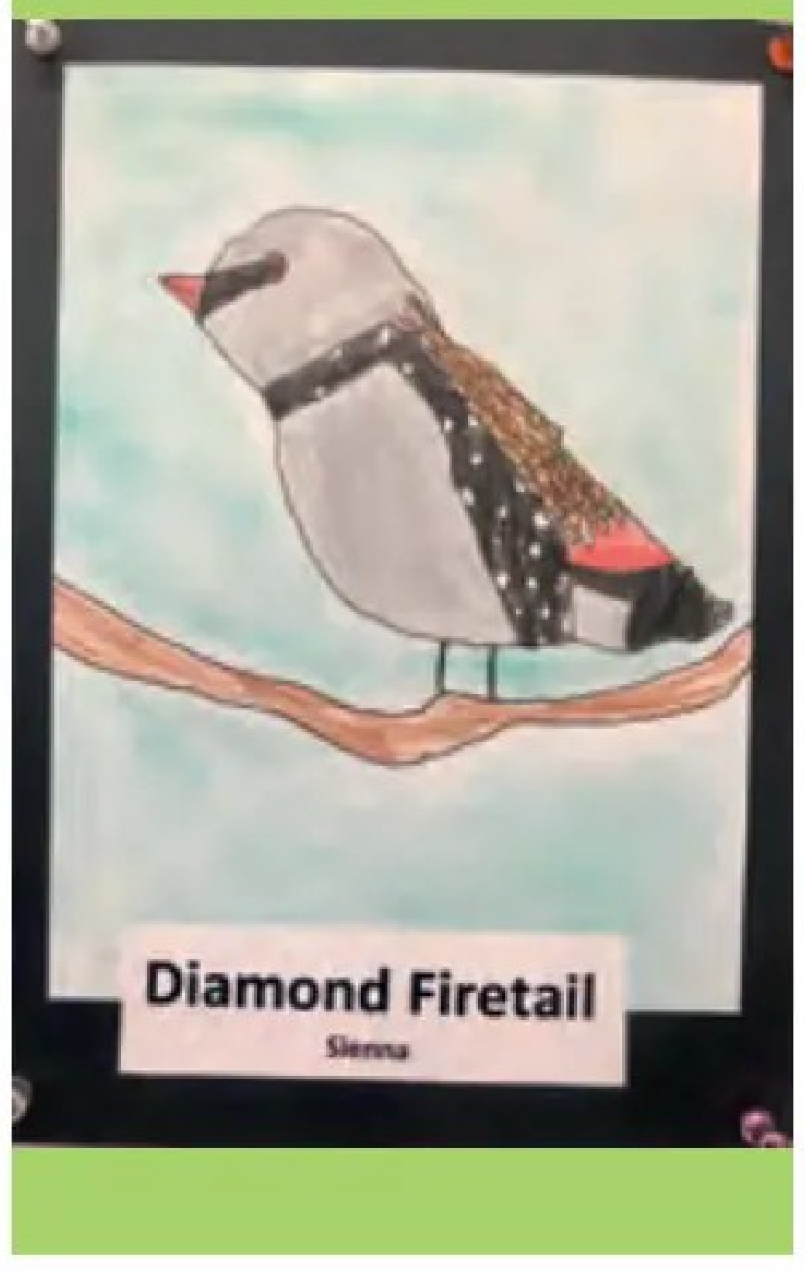
How does this then lead to learning about democracy? Throughout the class, each of the students' bird species is from one of eight habitats. These are Grassland, Wetland, Coastal, Woodland, Rainforest, Mallee, Alpine and Desert. The students then form groups based on the habitat that their bird species inhabits to discuss and establish their survival needs. Each bird species establishes their own electorate on 'Cockatoo Island', a fictitious location. A 'Prime Minister' is elected, after the usual speeches and using a secret ballot, as occurs in real life.

The classroom is then physically set up like parliament, with four habitats being the Government, set on one side, and four habitats being the Opposition, set on the opposite side. A 'Speaker' is elected, and students indulge in putting forward bills to be debated and then voted on. Bills are then passed or defeated.

For example, the Rifle Bird and Eclectus Parrot from the Rainforest electorate may put forward a motion such as; 'Planting more trees on Cockatoo Island to create habitat'. This may be an attractive bill for Rainforest and Woodland electorates; however, it would be despised by Grassland species such as the Plains Wanderer and Australian Hobby, whereby trees would shade out grasses and threaten their grassland habitat. After debating the pros and cons, the Speaker of the House, calls on all birds to vote. In this example, the bill was defeated.

Students gain hands-on experience by identifying with specific needs of a bird species, and through the process we have established within our government, begin to experience and understand the importance of having a voice within our Australian Democracy.





Student drawings of a (A) Plains Wanderer and (B) Diamond Firetail. Part of the 'Cockatoo Island' program that highlights the importance of Natural History illustration, particularly before the invention of the camera.

WORKING IN THE FIELD WITH SCIENTISTS

Each year, during National Science Week, the same Year 4 students take part in a bird banding program, working with real-life scientists from an organisation called, Bio-R based at Frahn's Farm, a property near Monarto, South Australia.

Students are met by Associate Professor David Paton, Director of Bio-R and School of Biological Sciences, Adelaide University. Professor Paton, and his team of ornithologists, lead the students through the various research techniques that help us understand the biology of birds and how they use their environment. The students are involved in mist netting, measuring, and banding threatened woodland birds. It involves fitting bands with unique numbers onto the legs of wild birds. Once banded, the lives of individual birds can be tracked through time. Students are involved in reptile and mammal monitoring as well.

The highlight for the students is no doubt the opportunity to hold a bird, prior to release. For many students, this is the first opportunity they have ever had to handle a bird. Species may include Diamond Firetails, Eastern Spinebills, Hooded Robins, as well as several thornbill, whistler and honeyeater species.

AUSSIE BIRD COUNT

Every year, during October, Birdlife Australia runs the Citizen Science program, the 'Aussie Bird Count'. It is a means by which Birdlife Australia seeks participants to download their free app and conduct a 20-minute survey of the bird species and numbers in the local area. This provides Australia-wide data, plotting trends of population increases and decreases in all states and territories. This program is a wonderful vehicle in schools. At Scotch College, we run the program at all levels within the Primary campus, resulting in students who are accurately aware of their local bird population. It fits wonderfully with the school aviary, 'Cockatoo Island' and the bird banding experience with Bio-R.

BETTER AT MATHS AND BIRDS!

Birds in Education forms an important foundation in developing a greater appreciation of biodiversity and has the spin-off benefits of attracting young people to bird watching and even aviculture. As a teacher, I warmly remember the Christmas card received by Jema in Year 3. She wrote, "Thank you for teaching me, Mr Pace. I am now better at Maths and Birds!"

Olive Legless Lizard

Year 4 student releasing a Peaceful Dove after it has been weighed, rung, and measured

Associate Professor David Paton demonstrates to students the method of processing a captured Peaceful Dove

Students witness the method of weighing a Diamond Firetail

A group of students watching the release of a threatened Diamond Firetail after it had been weighed and banded

Students handling an Olive Legless Lizard as part of the reptile monitoring component of their day with scientists in the field

Bio-R's Associate Professor, David Paton, releases a banded Adelaide Rosella

BIRD KEEPING IN AUSTRALIA
BONNIE RICKARDS

Year 4 student, Bonnie Rickards, was recently made an honorary member of the Avicultural Society of South Australia (ASSA). Bonnie has an aviary and keeps both finches and parrots

The following is a recount by 9-year-old Bonnie. Bonnie is a member of the Avicultural Society of South Australia and has birds at home.

OUR BIRD BANDING EXCURSION

BONNIE RICKARDS

Year 4 Scotch College, Adelaide

As part of National Science Week, the year four students from Scotch College went on a bird banding excursion. We went to see how birds are caught with nets, and bird scientist Dr David Paton taught us about threatened woodland bird species. The birds are captured in mist nets, banded for identification, and then measured, weighed and released.

While we were there, we also learnt a bit about reptiles, and how you must lift rocks up a certain way to protect yourself from being injured.

The thing I liked best was catching and examining the birds. It's a fun thing to do because it is good to interact with the birds while they are in your hands. We were there to learn about:

- How to hold birds
- How to catch them
- How and what they eat
- Each species' characteristics

When you're holding birds, you must be careful that you're not squeezing them too tightly around their necks, as it can sometimes stop them from breathing.

I liked the colour of the male Western Whistler because it is a much brighter gold than the female. The feathers are very smooth and oily, so that the rain and any water that falls onto them slips straight off, and the bird stays dry. The bird was very calm, and it didn't make any noise when it was handled.

Another cool thing was that the birds did not get hurt when they were caught, even though the net was quite big. It was a few metres wide, and very hard to see because it was made with thin string. It was tied from one tree to another, and the bird would fly into the net and slip down into a pocket, unhurt.

Bird banding is a fun thing to do, especially holding the birds and feeling how soft they are. Because the birds are so beautiful, I don't want them to be threatened, so I think this is a great program.

Year 4 student, Bonnie Rickards, holding a female Red-capped Robin prior to release

MY QUAILS AND FINCHES

AUTHOR

BONNIE RICKARDS

Aged 9

I HAVE many birds in my aviary, and, luckily, some of my birds have laid eggs. My favourite birds are Gouldian Finches and Japanese Quails. I have got both of these birds in my aviary.

The quails are different colours. Normally, girl quails are a shade of brown, and the boys are generally grey. Both boy and girl quails have a whitish-cream pattern on their bodies. Quails come in different sizes. Some are as big as half the size of a fully-grown standard-size chicken, and some are just 10 cm in length.

I feed my quails and finches smaller seeds because some bigger seeds can present a choking risk, and it is also hard for the quails to break them up into smaller pieces. Quails typically really like the seed heads of Johnson Grass and Plains Bristlegrass. Items that you should not be offering to your quails include avocado, foods/drinks that contain caffeine, chocolate, large seeds, salty foods, sweets, and meat.

When the girl quails have laid eggs, they will then start sitting on them, but when she is not sitting on them, touching them is not recommended. If you do touch them, there is a risk that the girl quail will not go back to sit on them, and the clutch will be lost. The eggs are around 35mm in length. After the eggs have been laid and the girl quail has started incubating them, they should hatch in around 18 to 20 days. It takes the baby quails one day to come out of their nest and start exploring what's around them. Baby quails have a little bit of fluff on them when they first hatch.

I hope my quails hatch soon and live a long time.

Bonnie with her birds

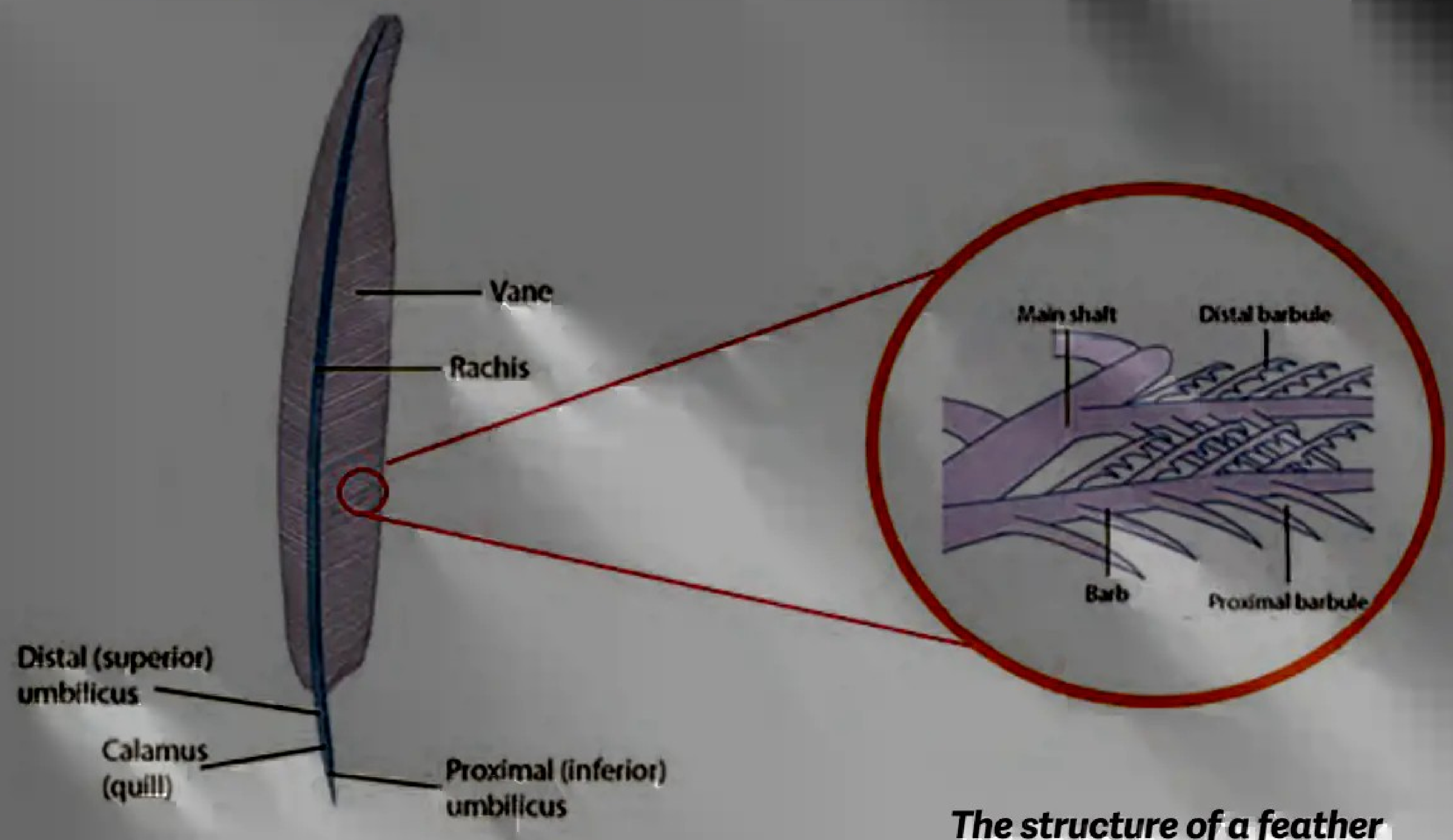
PHOTO SCOTT RICKARDS

A hand-raised Common Bronzewing Pigeon that shares the aviary with the finches and quail

PHOTO SCOTT RICKARDS

BIRDS OF A FEATHER OR

Feathers of a bird?



The structure of a feather

DID you know that the skin is the largest organ of any animal, including birds, and it is also the most visible to the owner? Consequently, skin and feather problems are a common presentation in avian medicine. From normal moulting to feather-damaging behaviour, and infectious diseases affecting the skin, beak, and nails there is a whole gamut of conditions that affect the skin. This article seeks to provide background knowledge of the skin, feathers, and other structures of the skin to the bird owner, and then introduce you to the myriad of problems confronting birds, their owners, and their vets.

NORMAL SKIN AND FEATHERS

A bird's skin, tightly attached to both the underlying muscles and the bony prominences of the skeleton, is very thin – only 0.1-1.0mm thick (compared to human skin, which is up to 4mm thick). It is so thin that in some parts of the body, it is almost transparent. Birds lack skin glands (so they can't sweat) but many have a preen gland at the base of the tail that secretes a sebaceous liquid that helps to clean the bird and keep it waterproof. It may also have roles in the production of Vitamin D3 (needed for strong bones), and even as a means by which birds can identify a partner of the opposite sex.

But the truly unique feature of avian skin is the feathers. These arise from feather follicles, arranged in tracts around the body known as *pterylae*. The featherless skin between these tracts is called *apterylae*. Each follicle is a cylindrical pit in the skin, lined with skin. At the base of the follicle is the dermal papilla, a small mound of dermis from which the feather grows. The feather itself has a central shaft (the rachis), from which arise smaller shafts (barbs), and from the barbs come the filamentous barbules which interlock with their neighbours to form the vane. Just below the vane is the plumaceous region, where a few downy barbs fail to interlock.

Within the rachis of an immature feather is the pulp, a loose network of blood vessels and nerves. (These feathers are called blood feathers). As the feather matures, the pulp retracts, leaving empty chambers within the shaft.

The colour of feathers is the result of the combination of pigments and feather structure. A variety of pigments are distributed in different layers of the feather structure and, when combined with special features of the barb structure that affect the passage of light, produce the spectrum of colours seen.

Feathers perform a range of functions for the bird; they allow flight, they act as an insulation layer to control the bird's body temperature, they keep birds dry, and they even allow birds to hide themselves. Another major function is communication, particularly during the breeding season.

Because birds lack sweat glands, they rely on evaporative heat loss from the respiratory tract and heat transfer through apterylae (the featherless tracts of skin) to cool their bodies. To do this, many birds hold their feathers close to the body and may extend their wings, exposing the apterylae. Conversely, to retain body heat when ill or cold, they fluff their feathers up to trap body heat against the skin. (Ostriches do the reverse, i.e., they raise their feathers to promote heat loss and hold them close to conserve body heat.)

Moulting, the shedding of old, worn feathers and the renewal of plumage, is a regular event. It is controlled by a wide range of factors including thyroid activity, reproductive hormones, photoperiod, body condition, age, and diet. After a series of juvenile moults to attain adult plumage, most birds go on to moult one to two times annually. These moults, often referred to as prenuptial and postnuptial moults occur in spring and autumn respectively. The pattern of moulting is orderly and in the following progression (with some overlap): the inner primaries;

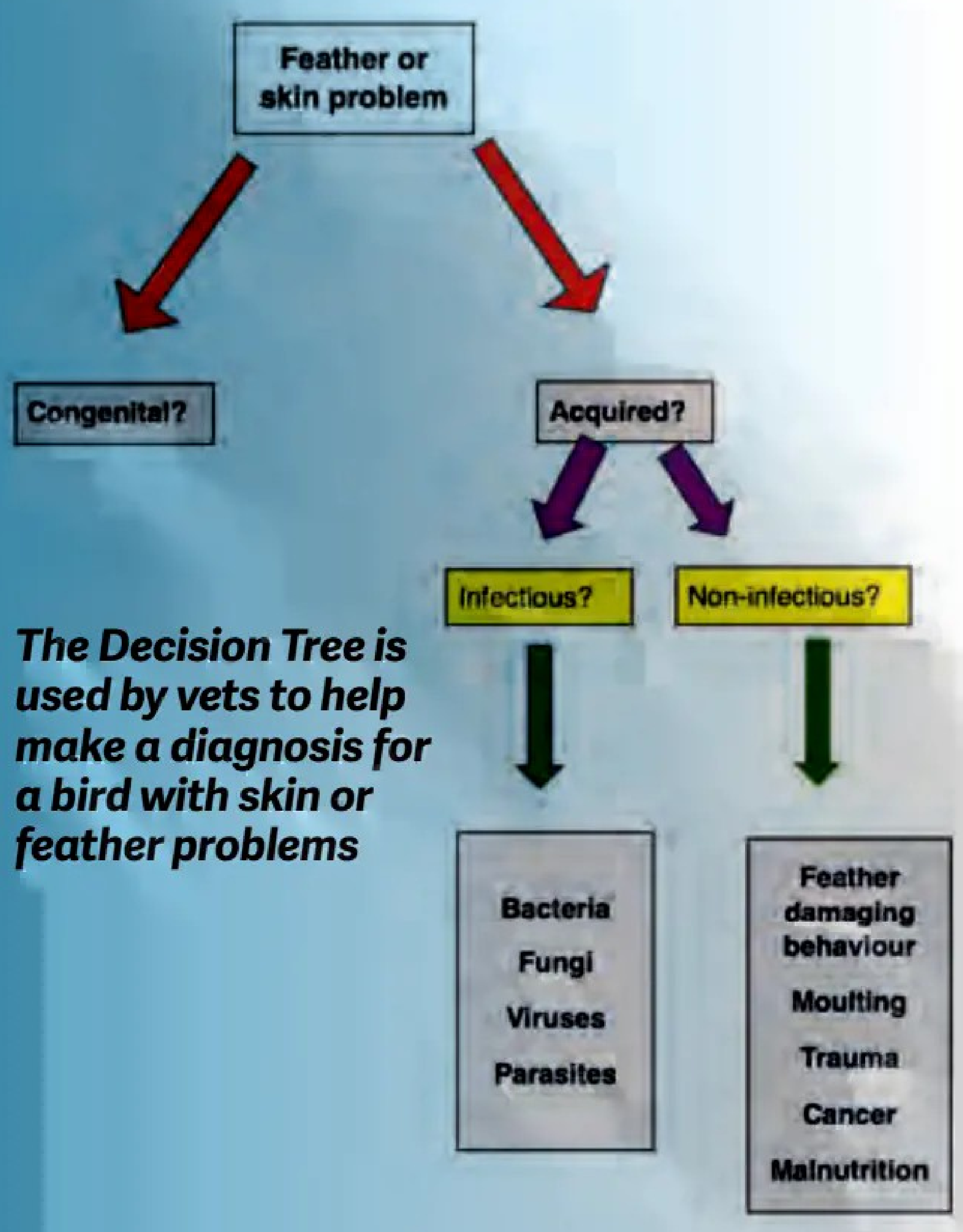
AUTHOR & PHOTOS
PROF BOB DONELEY
BVSc FANZCVS (Avian Medicine)

the outer primaries; the secondaries and tail feathers; and finally, the body contour feathers. It is usually bilaterally symmetrical and is paced to avoid loss of flight capacity at any time.

When it is time to moult an old feather, a proliferation of skin cells at the base of the follicle separates the old feather from the dermal papilla and allows it to shed. These cells then start to group themselves into two series of spiral barb ridges. The tips of these ridges end along a longitudinal line on the ventral aspect of the feather (the seam). On the top side of the feather, the cells thicken to form the rachis, with the dermal pulp within it. As it grows the feather emerges from the follicle as a pointed projection with a dermal core and an epidermal cover (sheath). This sheath then progressively ruptures, freeing the barbs that have separated along the seam and allowing the feather to open. Much of the increased grooming activity seen in birds at this time is to remove this sheath.

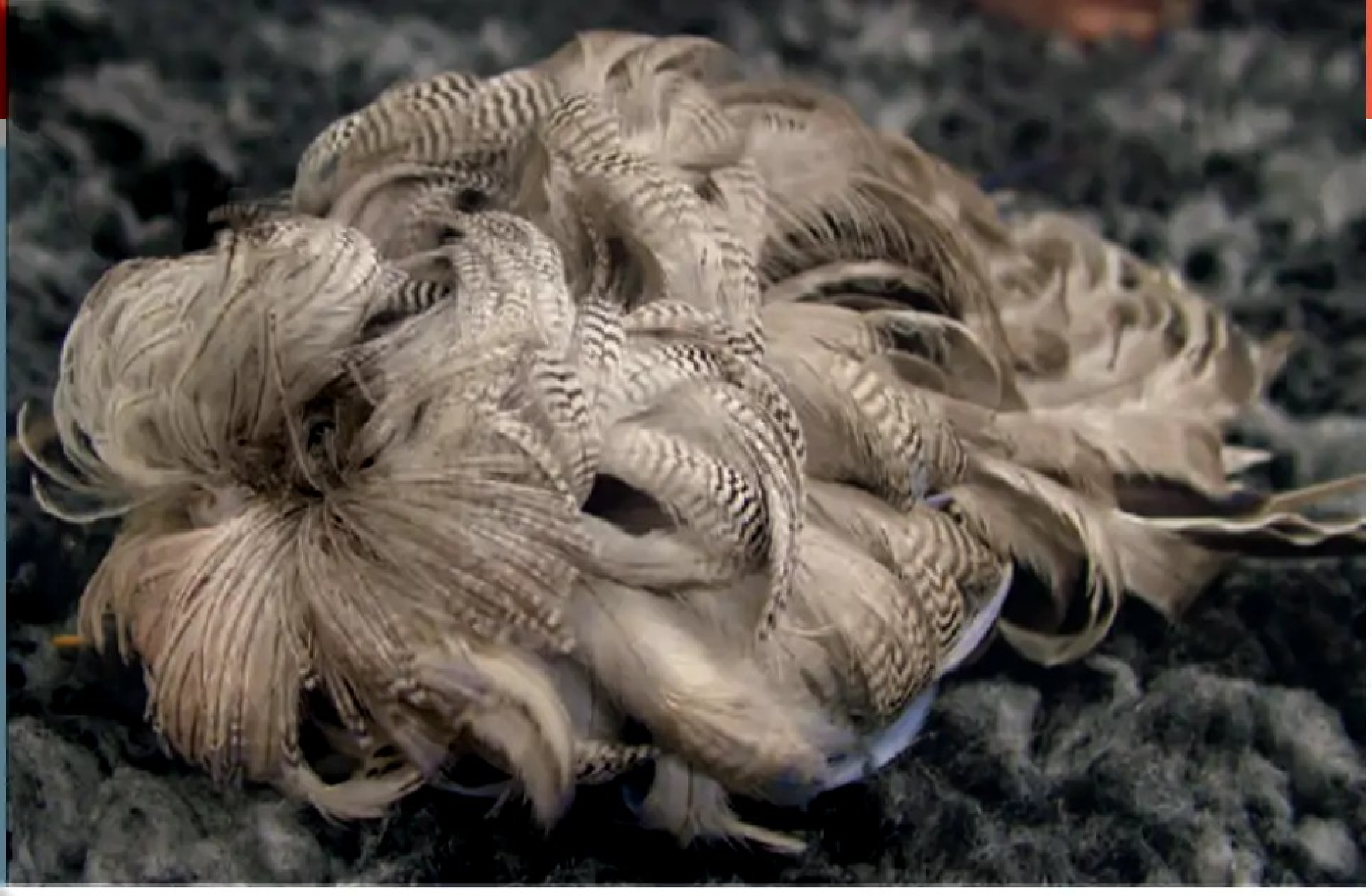
WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Being a large and very obvious part of the body, skin conditions are quickly noticed by bird keepers. When you take an affected bird to your avian vet with a skin or feather complaint, they will start on a decision tree. The first thing to decide is whether this is a congenital problem e.g., 'feather duster' Budgerigars – in other words, the bird was hatched with the genetic makeup for the condition, or whether it is acquired i.e., it developed after hatch, with no genetic component to the problem.



The Decision Tree is used by vets to help make a diagnosis for a bird with skin or feather problems

Acquired conditions are those caused by either infectious agents or non-infectious problems. Infectious agents are living organisms capable of causing disease such as bacteria, fungi, viruses, or parasites. Non-infectious (non-living) diseases include feather-damaging behaviour, malnutrition, cancer, or even moulting.



A feather duster Budgerigar

SO HOW DOES A VET WORK OUT WHAT'S WRONG?

The first thing your vet will do is to obtain a detailed history of both your bird and the problem. Try not to keep highlighting the problem – the chances are high that the cause of the problem lies somewhere in the bird's past before the problem began. Also, try to avoid jumping to conclusions – you may be right, but it is very distracting to your vet when they are trying to get a sense of your bird's lifestyle and not just the problem in front of them.

While the vet is talking to you, they will be watching your bird in its carry cage for clues. Does the bird appear unwell? Is it itchy? What are the droppings like? What condition are the feathers in? Are there any breathing problems? We call this the distant exam, and it's important to let your bird settle down for a few minutes so that it will stop hiding some of the symptoms.

Your vet will then perform a detailed exam of your bird after taking them out of the cage. The vet will want to look at everything, not just the obvious, so try not to get impatient!

Putting it all together in their mind, the vet will have developed a list of possibilities (we call them differential diagnoses) and will then recommend appropriate tests to perform to give you an answer. Just remember that there are no tests for some problems, such as feather-damaging behaviour; we can only diagnose behavioural problems after ruling out physical complaints.

Your vet is likely to recommend blood tests (to look at your bird's internal health), skin biopsies (to get a closer, detailed look at the skin), X-rays (to check for painful internal lesions), and PCR tests (DNA tests looking for viruses. This can be quite expensive, so your vet will give you a broad estimate and work out a plan that suits you and your bird.

Finally, once all the tests are back and your vet has decided what the real problems are, they will give you a treatment plan. It may involve medications, shampoos, diet changes, behavioural training, and so on.

One thing I will emphasise though, is that many people delay going to the vet until the problem has been preset for days, weeks, months, or even years. As a rule of thumb, the longer you, the birdkeeper, leave it, the more expensive it will be to diagnose and treat, and – in some cases – it may never get better!

So, if your bird has a problem – don't wait, go and see your vet now.

NOW, LET'S LOOK AT SOME MORE UNUSUAL PROBLEMS:

Congenital Conditions

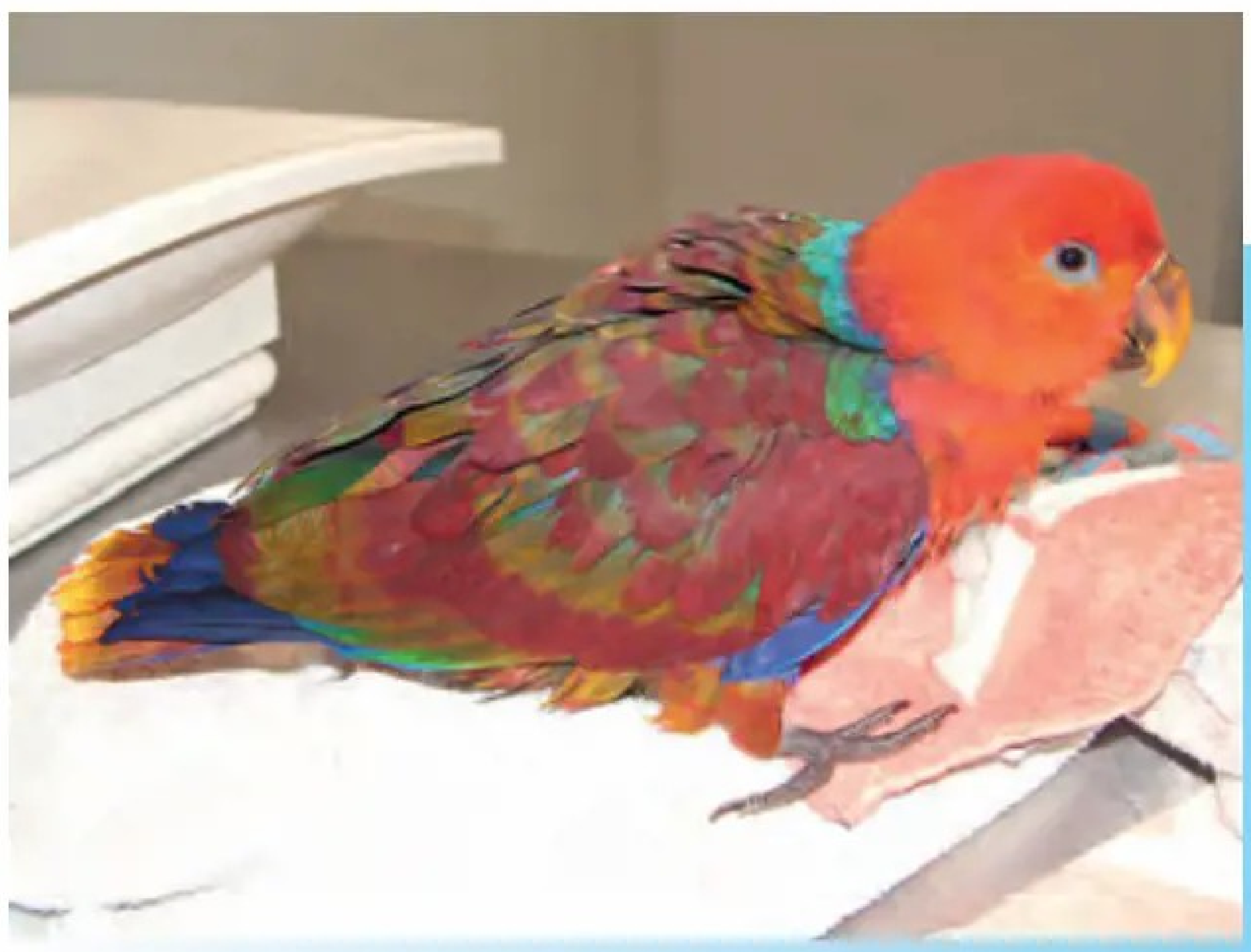
'Feather Duster' or 'Chrysanthemum' Syndrome in Budgerigars

Juvenile Budgerigars that exhibit continued growth of flight, tail and contour feathers, with the feathers being soft and curled giving the bird the appearance of a feather duster. They are unable to fly and make a barely audible noise. Most die within the first few years of life. This is a congenital condition, thought to be a lethal recessive genetic disorder. There has been discussion about an association with Budgerigar Herpesvirus, but a cause and effect has not been established.

Acquired Conditions – Non-infectious

Malnutrition

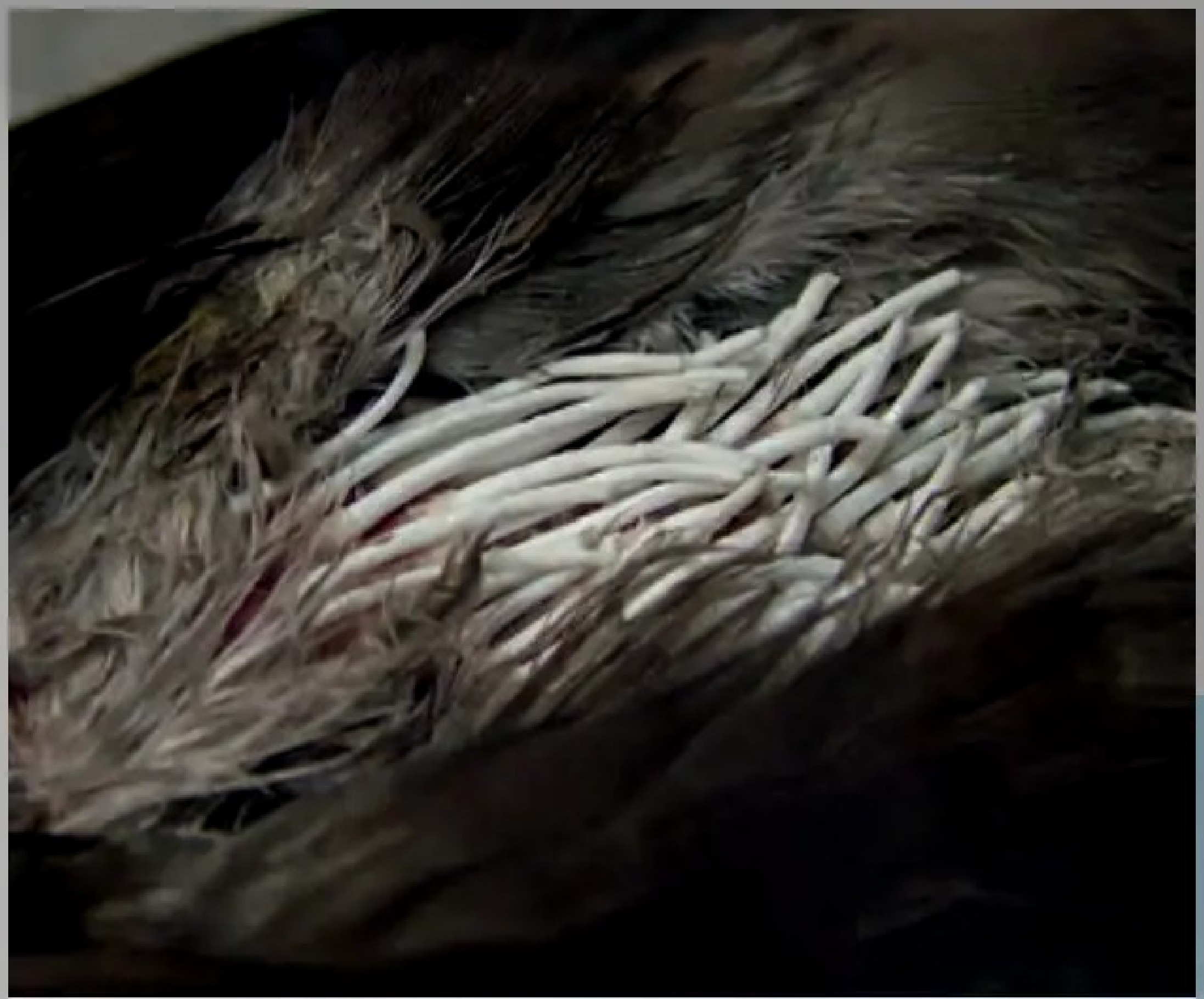
Nutrition will affect both the feather structure and the amount and type of carotenoids in the feather. Malnutrition – either an excess or a deficiency of nutrients – can therefore produce unusual feather colours in birds such as the juvenile Eclectus shown in Figure 3. Many of these birds, with their diet corrected, return to normal after a few moults.



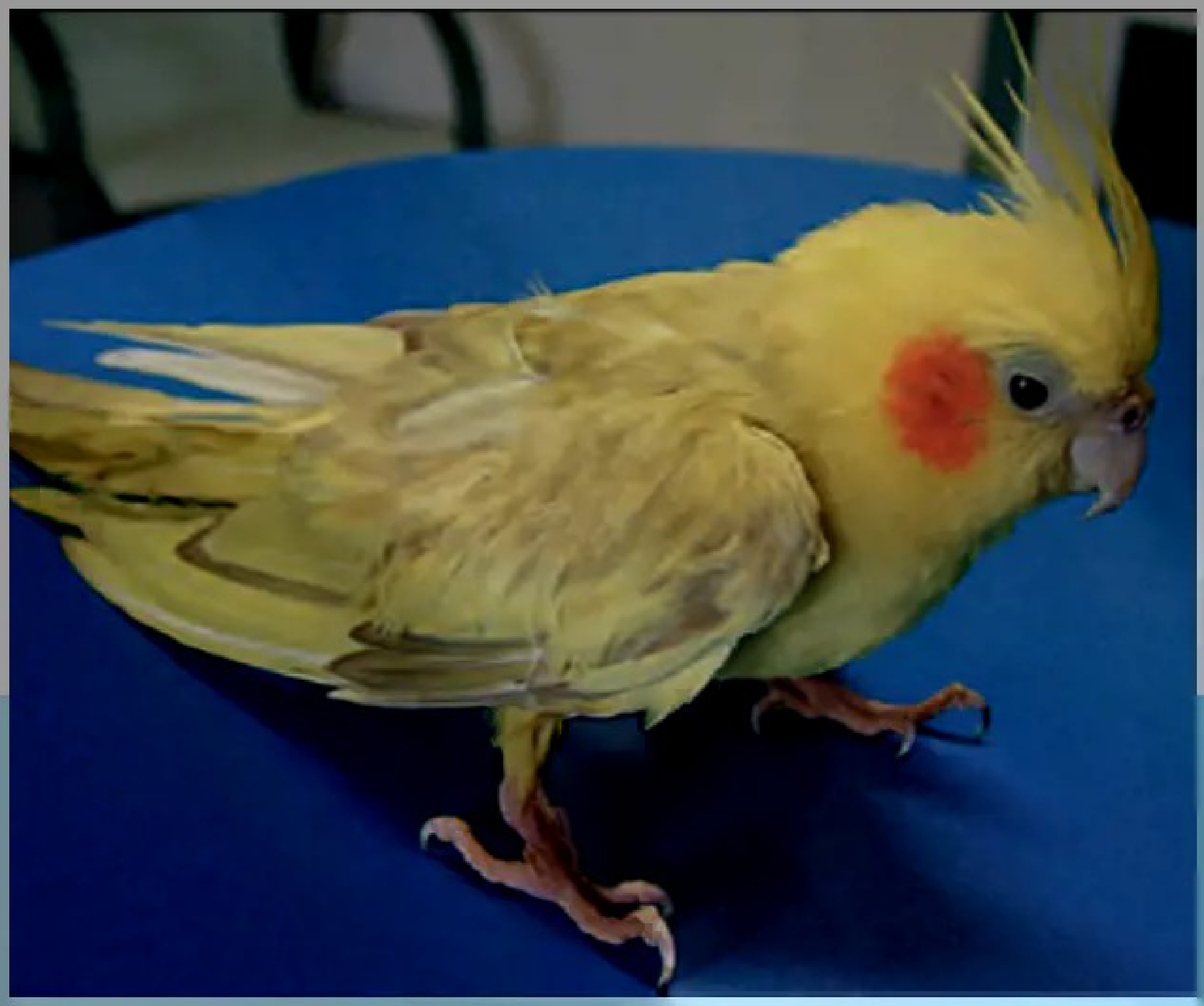
This Eclectus Parrot was given an excessive amount of vitamins in its diet while being hand reared. This abnormal colouring is the result

Retained Feather Sheaths

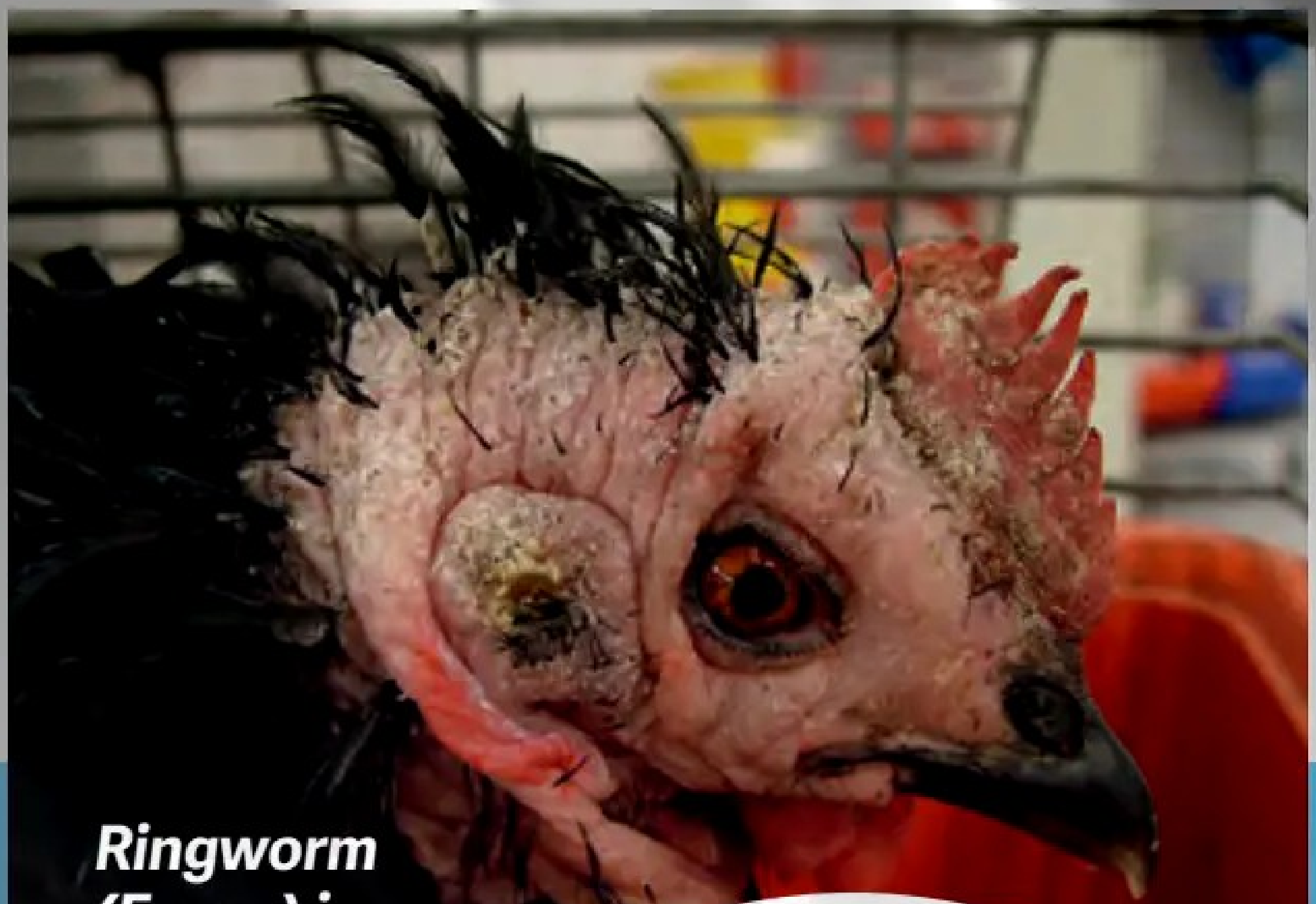
As feathers grow, they are encased in a keratin sheath. This is removed by the bird when it is grooming, allowing the feather to unfurl. The retained feather sheaths on the cockatiel shown in Figure 4, represent an inability to groom normally e.g., beak abnormalities, spinal pain, or (as in this case) wearing an Elizabethan collar after surgery. Once the collar was removed and the bird spent several hours grooming itself, the feathers were normal in appearance.



Retained feather sheaths on the down feathers of a cockatiel that wore a collar for too long



An elderly cockatiel diagnosed with hypothyroidism required lab testing to rule out chronic liver disease, as their symptoms closely resemble each other



Ringworm (Favus) in a chicken

Chronic Liver Disease

Chronic liver problems are all too common in pet birds. They are often due to years of a seed-only diet or as in the case shown in Figure 5, a poorly functioning thyroid gland. Once diagnosed and treated correctly, this bird moulted heavily, and the new feathers were normal in appearance.

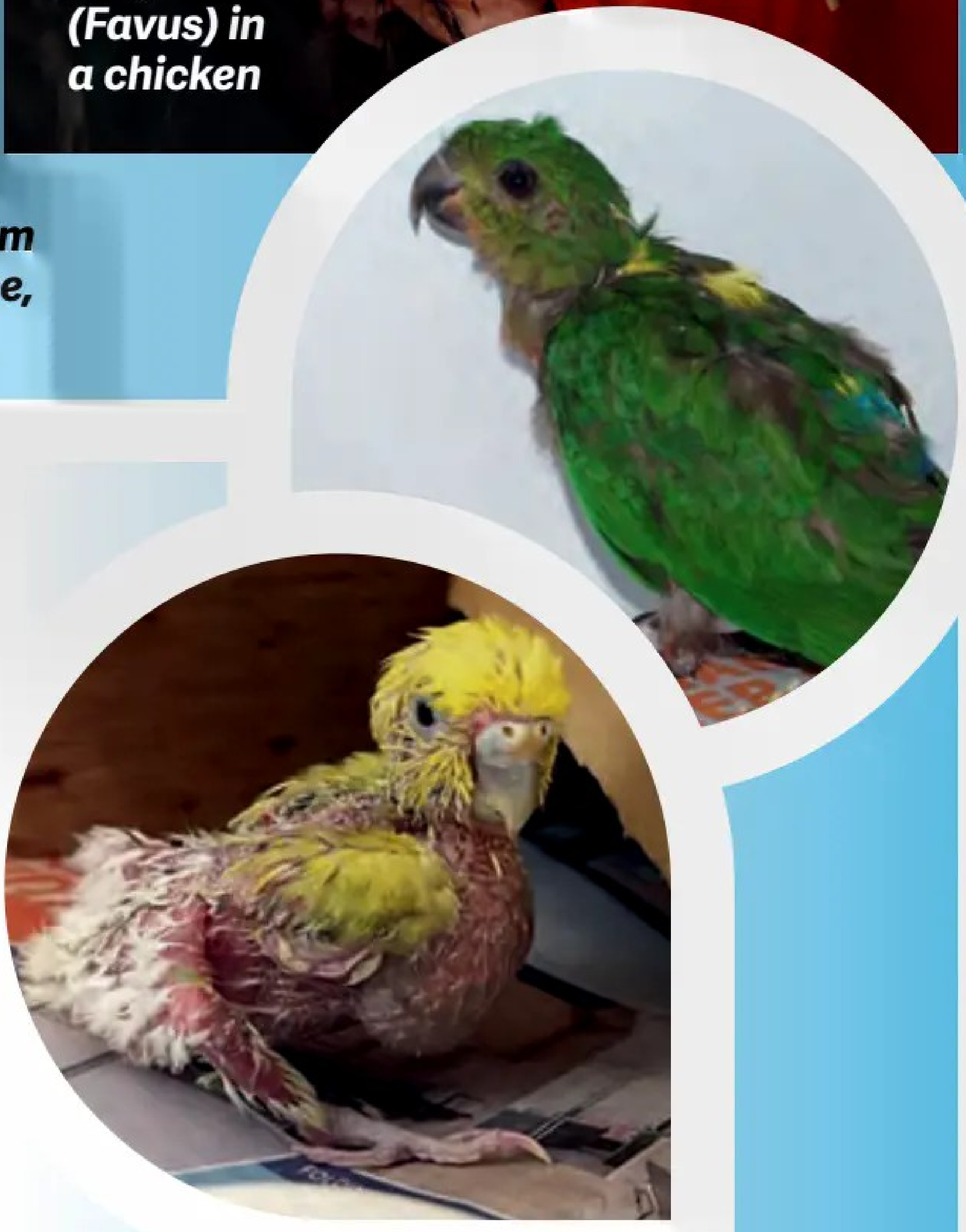
Acquired Conditions – Infectious Diseases

Ringworm

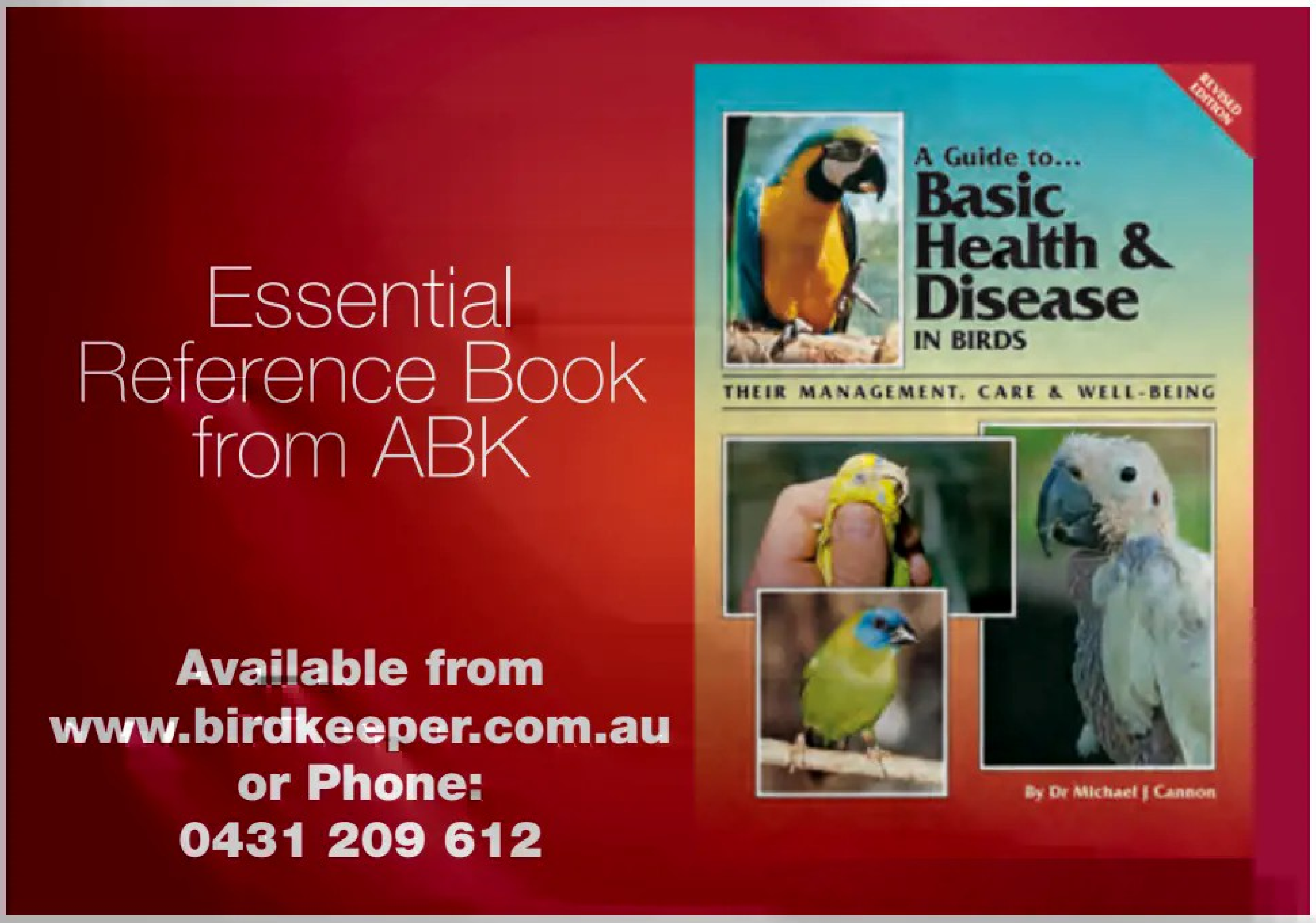
This is a fungal infection of the skin, usually associated with people, cats, and guinea pigs. Occasionally we will see it in backyard chickens. Favus, as it is known, is uncommon but it can be transmitted to and from people. Diagnosis is difficult, as it does not have the classical 'ring' like lesions we associate with this infection. The chicken in Figure 6 was only diagnosed by taking a sample of skin and sending it to a pathologist. Treatment took nearly 2 months, but the chicken eventually returned to normal.

Beak and Feather Disease

Most people are familiar with the appearance of Psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD) in cockatoos, but other parrot species also contract this disease. Beak overgrowth is only seen in cockatoos – in the Superb Parrot and Budgerigar shown in Figure 7, the feather loss, untidy plumage, and colour changes display the signs we commonly see in other species.



PBFD in a juvenile King Parrot and a Budgerigar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MY LIFE WITH

Derbyan Parrots

PART 2

Too warm in the basket; a 5-week old Derbyan crawls out to yawn and view the world

Mirror training – we use mirrors to keep nursery babies in touch with their species' appearance

AUTHOR & PHOTOS
EB CRAVENS

FEEDING

Here at the Perfect Parrot, our daily feeding regime includes cut-up or shredded vegetables along with green stalks and stems. In the winter, the birds often just ignore them, but during the springtime and summer breeding season, they will seek them out. Derbyans, however, are not huge eaters of green food. However, this changed abruptly for the male from the day of the first chick hatching. Formerly ignored celery chunks offered as part of the morning feed, were pulverised enthusiastically. This clue as to the presence of new babies became an annual event with Lapsang, who was always ready with nutritious foods for his mate in the nestbox.

We dramatically increase the amount of food given to parrots during the nesting cycle. I usually walk around the aviaries at 6:30 am and offer a piece of walnut or almond to each bird in my flock. It gives them a little something while they wait another hour for me to gather and chop fruits and vegetables and prepare the morning soak and cook mixes. It also maintains my relationship with breeding pairs. Even the aggressive males will often 'humble' themselves to take a nut, and sometimes the female will emerge from her box to do the same.

It is interesting to note the times, during incubation, when a female will forego their morning nut:

1. On rainy or cold, damp mornings.
2. During the critical day 7 to 17 period of incubation.
3. On the mornings when eggs hatch.

Of course, this type of rapport with breeding pairs who are also former pets has been built up over several years. Sometimes Souchang would come out for her morning nut.... but would insist that Lapsang feed it to her!

We increased the amount of fat and carbohydrates in the Derbyan's diet as the chicks grew. Corn on the cob was often added to the regular foods offered. Derbyans will of course eat select fruits but are much fonder of cooked seeds and grains along with some vegetables. As they reportedly live wild in areas of pine forest, shelled pine nuts or unshelled pinon nuts are close kin to their wild foods and may be added to the diet. These are rich in fat (63%), protein (20%) and carbohydrates.

HAND REARING

After seventeen days we checked the nest box. Two plump and stuffed Psittacula derbiana were taken from the mother and the box was returned to its place (Though it must be noted that our Derbyans were not prone to double clutching). Often with our breeding pairs, we would give their nest box back but leave it open to simulate a 'predator' having taken the babies. Both chicks were closed banded within a few days with size 3/8" bands.

Handfeeding began some six hours after removal when the newly pulled babies' crops were approximately 90% empty. I regularly feed formula to newly pulled chicks before their crops are completely empty as I wish for the working enzymes from the last feed given by the parents to mix as thoroughly as possible with the homemade formula we use. This food is a mixture of 50% commercial parrot hand-rearing formula and ground grains such as seven-grain rolled cereal (for humans), organic sunflower seeds, oat bran, plus some spirulina flakes and bentonite clay. When mixing this powdered food, some raw items like mashed papaya or scraped apple pulp are always added as well.

As weaning approached, we began adding a sprinkling of wheat germ, rolled oats and sunflower kernels to the baby food. The latter gives substance and texture to the gruel. This can only be done if the aviculturist is using a spoon or cup-feeding technique with neonates. We employ cut-off small plastic yoghurt cups which are easy to sterilize and can be squeezed to correct beak size for different sized psittacines.

Our reasoning behind using our custom-made formulas began decades ago when we were discontented with the way newly pulled parrot chicks' droppings would abruptly change from healthy thick green and white when the parents were feeding them, to a runny tan consistency and colour when fed 100% commercial formulas. Our additives solved that problem immediately and kept faecal matter at the normal green and white appearance!

FLEDGING

As the two chicks feathered out at around six weeks of age, they began venturing out of their towel-draped nursery basket and flapping their way across the room to 'Papa'. They were moved to a long, low cage with different-sized perches and greenery and a top that opened. Branches, flower buds, millet sprays and soaked pellet/grain mix were provided. Three days later the flapping increased, and the first flights were initiated with awkward crash landings in the leafy branches provided in the fledging room. Baskets for landing were placed in front of any windows that posed a danger of hitting the glass. Parrots fledge much more safely when given targets to fly to rather than leaving to chance where they choose to go.

At this point, the two chicks also began to exercise individual will and chose to sleep apart inside their small holding cage.

Close scrutiny of the chicks led us to believe we had one male and one female. The older bird had a larger skull and forehead and was more vocal. While the younger had a rounder profile and would sometimes hunker down and make squealing noises like the begging sounds of her mother. In addition, noted conservationist and breeder Fred Bauer clued us into his reliable method for early sexing of *Psittacula derbiana*. One should note the wide black band behind each cheek at the base of the skull. In males the black most often directly touches the dark green of the neck feathers while in females there is a thin pale beige separation between the black and the green. What's more, we saw that as the orange baby beaks began to fade to black after fledging, the perceived male's beak changed much more slowly than that of his 'sister.'

At eight weeks of age, the fledglings were nibbling cooked food and grains well, on their own, were down to one hand-feeding session in the evening and perhaps a little top-up mid-morning and were flying around the cabin in short bursts.

As these youngsters were destined for a pet store, some progressive wing trimming was done. The outer stiffest two flight feathers on each wing were trimmed to decrease flapping efficiency. One week later a third feather was trimmed. At this point, they flapped faster but flew slower and their control on shorter flights was excellent.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

We began to house them separately as they did not like one another. A week later the older sibling escaped from his garden cage and sat silently out in the treetops for four hours! Every hour I would take his spoon and baby food mug outside and ding the two together to emit a familiar sound. At 4:00 p.m. the chick squawked at the noise and gave away his whereabouts. Going to the base of the tree, I coaxed him down to be fed and put away. Since at no time, was he out of control, we were, in fact, pleased he had gotten a taste of 'wild time.'

FULLY WEANED

The two chicks were fully weaned and fledged at a little over eight weeks and were sold to two separate and very conscientious bird shops, that allow parrots freedom in a flight room.

At this stage, Derbyans are noticeably independent and standoffish. They seldom endure heavy petting and are not fond of a hand over their head. Some, especially females will flash eyes and snap if prodded wrongly. Nevertheless, when raised sensitively they are extremely well-behaved, will step up on command, give kisses and will permit a surreptitious hug to the chest or stroking of the feet and tummy. We have found that the older a Derbyan gets, the more it will calm down and enjoy touch. We have had pets who would allow stoking once they enter the puberty years; but as youngsters, we give them plenty of space and patience, rather than put them in a situation where nipping may occur.

CONCLUSION

I find that *derbiana* make wonderful pets, especially in a household with more than a single parrot. They were once referred to as being one of the most underrated pet bird species in the US. They do like to gnaw on things, but otherwise are breathtakingly sleek pastel speedsters that produce minimal noise and demand little of their owners.

A rope perch was too close to the woodwork and our Derbyan chewed

Katy visits the fledging aviary and gets attention from a Derbyan

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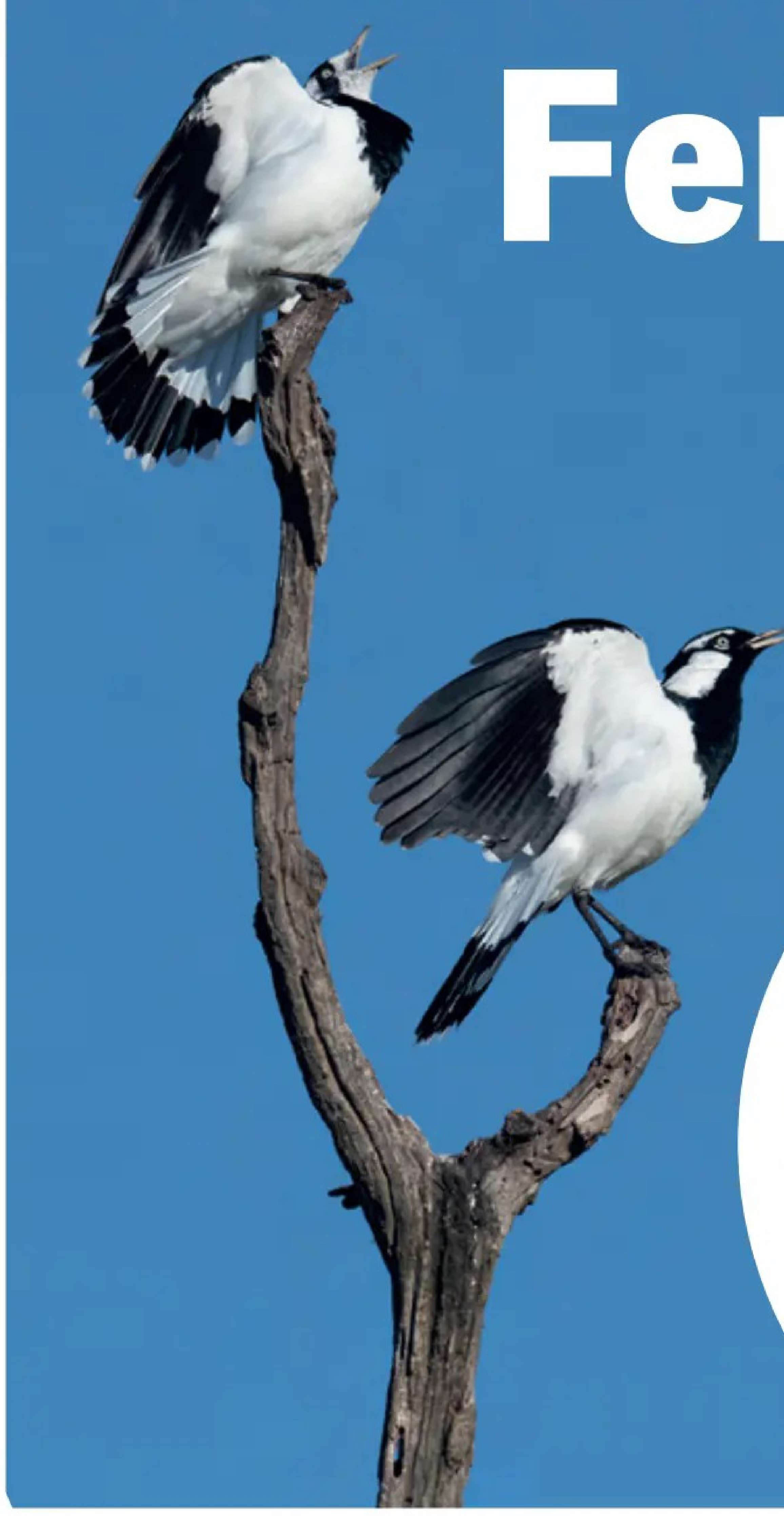
THE OVERLOOKED SONG OF Female Birds



Australian Magpie-Larks duetting, female top and male below
PHOTO MICHAEL FUHRER

Tawny Owl
PHOTO HANS RENTSCH

House Wren
PHOTO DAN DZURISIN

AUTHOR
DR KIT PRENDERGAST
BA & BSc (First Class Honors), PhD, Postdoctoral Researcher

INTRODUCTION

Birds are renowned for their songs, having been featured in art and literature throughout history.

Bird song is also of great scientific interest. As a complex behaviour, its study has advanced diverse fields, including avian physiology, behavioural ecology, evolutionary biology, neurophysiology, and conservation biology.

Despite this popularity, only a subset of the avian tree of life can sing – the Oscine Passerines, which evolved relatively late in avian evolution, but today are some of the most successful birds, and certainly most diverse birds, on the planet, comprising approximately 60% of the roughly 11,000 species of birds currently described. Many, if not all, birds emit calls, but when we think of song, this refers to a sequence of sounds with a particular melody and structure.

When it comes to artistic representation, public perception, and even scientific research, it has been assumed that it is the male that sings. This may be in part based on how, due to the unequal parental investment, resulting in sexual selection favouring choosy females and males evolving signals, such as song, that either reflect their good genes or exploit a previous sensory bias (evolution of beauty). And this certainly makes sense (and has been well-supported) by evolutionary theory. There is an unequal investment at the gamete stage and typically beyond, between the sexes. Eggs are much larger than sperm, and much more costly – they require more energy to develop, and females are born with a finite amount, unlike males and sperm. Furthermore, with birds, the eggs also involve additional energetic investment: yolk and whites which contain fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals, and an eggshell that requires a lot of calcium.

Then there are further investments in birds, where in species that have uniparental care, it is typically the female who incubates the eggs, defends them from predators, then feeds the chicks, defends them, and teaches them skills to prepare them for life outside of the nest such as flying and foraging. All this means that sexual selection favours females to be selective about whose sperm fertilises their eggs, and who sires their offspring, leading to competition and for males to evolve "costly" traits to signal their quality as a sire. Song is one such trait – only males with good health, and high cognitive abilities, can produce song.

But this certainly does not mean that song is exclusively the purview of males. Many traits can have multiple functions, be coopted for other purposes, or be adapted for another function. Feathers of course are a key example – they likely evolved for insulation or even sexual signalling in pre-avian dinosaurs, and only later became co-opted for the purpose of flight in avian dinosaurs.

THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE BIRDSONG

Despite song historically being primarily attributed to male songbirds. For many years, standard definitions of bird song were 'long, complex vocalisations produced by males in the breeding season'. Evidence however indicates this definition is incorrect. There is substantial and widespread documentation of song in female birds. Moreover, female songbird songs can be structurally and functionally similar to that of males. It is also believed to have evolved during the early evolution of birds. We can therefore be confident that female song is biologically and ecologically relevant, and has been involved in the evolution of bird communication.

In 2016, a survey of all songbirds by *Webb et al.* revealed that females sing in 64% of species where the male sings. Numbers continue to grow as researchers watch more closely for female song. This percentage also may grow, because this same survey found that sufficient information did not exist to determine the sex-specificity of song in 3500 out of the 4814 (73%) species of songbirds. Most of these species are monomorphic (and thus more likely for both sexes to sing), or in poorly studied or difficult-to-access regions such as the tropics. Part of this bias then is due to how birdsong (and birds in general) has been historically studied in temperate regions where male song is more common. For the female birds that are known to sing, there is also a lack of documentation in terms of descriptions of song structure, written articles, species accounts, or archived media in comparison to male birds.

There is a more insidious reason for this bias. Historically, women have been excluded from pursuing science. Thankfully today, women (such as I!) can pursue their passions for advancing our understanding of the natural world. Interestingly, Professor Kevin Omland (University of Maryland), Dr Evangeline Rose (University of Maryland), and Dr Karan Odom (Cornell University) investigated in "New insights from female bird song: towards an integrated approach to studying male and female communication roles", published in *Biology Letters*, the trends in the rise of documenting female birdsong. They revealed the key driver of this paradigm shift was due to more women entering the field of birdsong research. Earlier papers on birdsong were by males in the US, Canada, England, and Germany, who focussed on migratory birds that breed in the north temperate zone. Over the last twenty years, the rise in papers on tropical birds, female species with prolific song, research on how female birds use song, how they learn song, and male-female songbird duets, was primarily published by female authors. 68% of female bird song papers were by women. This compares with 44% by women on bird song in general. They conclude that this is a key example of why it is important to increase the representation of women in STEM.

Alpine Accentor
PHOTO HARI K PATIBANDA

Northern Cardinal
PHOTO DAN DZURISIN

Superb Lyrebird female
PHOTO MICHAEL FUHRER

Black-headed Grosbeak adult female
PHOTO DAN DZURISIN

Black-headed Grosbeak adult male
PHOTO DAN DZURISIN

Black-headed Grosbeak juvenile
PHOTO DAN DZURISIN

WHY WE NEED TO ADDRESS THIS BIAS

It is therefore evident that females are not the "mute" sex, and rather female birdsong is widespread and meaningful but has been historically neglected, and still today is relatively understudied and under-documented. Why does this matter? On multiple accounts! As we have seen in many fields, the historical discrimination against considering the female aspect in science has led to many shortcomings in the scientific literature, biases, and misrepresentations. This is also so with birdsong. This has practical implications. When monitoring a species, for example, conservation or population ecology, if we monitor both male and female birdsong, we can get a better understanding of population size and structure. For species with sex-specificity in their songs, this can allow researchers to understand the population sex ratio, and monitor paired vs unpaired individuals of each sex in a population. We also know that male song can be disrupted due to anthropogenic factors such as urbanisation, with implications for mate attraction, yet to date, there have been no studies on whether such factors alter female song and fitness.

Investigating both male and female song allows a comparative neurophysiological approach to the similarities as well as sex-specific contexts and controls in which male and female birds sing. We know, neurophysiologically, that there are both similarities and differences between the sexes across all species. Whilst we have a good understanding of the neurobiological, hormonal and physiological mechanisms controlling and regulating song in males, we lack this for females. Functional studies can also investigate the context in which female birds sing – research to date suggests females use bird song in mate attraction, as well as in mating activities and resource defence. In fact, in Stripe-headed Sparrows *Aimophila r. ruficauda*, a Neotropical species of passerine that duets, it was found that females not only sing competitively against other females, but they also sing more than males, play a leading singing role, and exhibit a longer-term response than males.

Research to date suggests that for most species, the primary function of female bird song is intrasexual competition (as with males), and therefore female birdsong appears more frequently in species where there is high female-female competition. Females will sing to defend their territories, breeding sites or mates from other females, or even to lure males away from other females. Many other females also sing with their partners, to coordinate parental care, or maintain group cohesion.

We can also seek to look at why some birds have male-only songs and place it in an evolutionary context. Based on phylogeny, song in both sexes was the ancestral state, and therefore female song has been lost in some bird lineages. Research suggests the main correlate of the loss of female bird song in lineages is that it is linked to being migratory. Most northern temperate species, which lack female bird song, are migratory. Because males typically arrive at the breeding ground before females to establish a short-term breeding territory, there is selection for them to sing, but not for the females, who arrive later. In addition, because most migratory species do not establish pair bonds, the need for females to sing to maintain these pair bonds is not required, as it is in sedentary species.

Prothonotary Warbler
PHOTO MICHAEL FUHRER

Eurasian Collared Dove
PHOTO HARI K PATIBANDA

Red Collared Dove
PHOTO HARI K PATIBANDA

Zebra Finches, adult female right and immature bird left
PHOTO GLENN ROMAN

Examples of female birdsong

So, let's delve into some examples of species where females sing:

- A few issues ago in ***BirdKeeper*** I wrote about owls (Prendergast, Kit. 2023. *How Wise Are We About Owls?*, ***Australian BirdKeeper***. Aug/Sept 2023. vol. 36, issue 11, pp. 626-627) – owls are an example of where females sing. Many owl species have sex-specific hoots, and mated pairs are even known to combine their hoots into a duet. Tawny Owls *Strix aluco* have sex-specific territorial responses.
- There are sex differences in the vocalisations of the Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, which interestingly can be linked to sex differences in syrinx structure.
- Male Lyrebirds have been made famous thanks to a David Attenborough documentary, but female Superb Lyrebirds *Menura novaehollandiae* are also known for elaborate mimetic vocal displays.
- In wild populations of Zebra Finches *Taeniopygia castanotis*, it was found that males and females engage in a private vocal duet at the nest.
- In Northern Cardinals *Cardinalis cardinalis*, pairs exchange songs when in the vicinity of the nest, which appears to serve to coordinate biparental care.
- Australian Magpie-Larks *Grallina cyanoleuca* have convergent vocal strategies, and duet together, which serves a cooperative function.
- In the Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*, females use song to attract males.
- Female Prothonotary Warblers *Protonotaria citrea* sing during the mate acquisition period.
- In female Black-headed Grosbeaks *Pheucticus melanocephalus*, females sing, the function of which is family group maintenance.

- In House Wrens *Troglodytes aedon*, females use song to defend against male and female conspecifics. Females sing most frequently at the onset of egg laying, when eggs are left unguarded and susceptible to conspecific attack, and females that sing more to conspecific intrusions lose fewer eggs to ovicide, indicating a clear adaptive role for female song.

ADVANCING AVIAN BIRDSONG RESEARCH

It is now apparent that many female birds sing, and that there are many gaps in the knowledge regarding female bird song. Researchers, birders and bird-keepers, armed with this awareness, need to evaluate the sex of singing birds, and document differences in context or structure. Indeed, we need more documentation of female song, in terms of audio recordings and detailed descriptions, and for bird song documentation as a whole, accurate and reliable documentation about the sex of the singer.

There are certainly ample opportunities for those with captive birds. Researchers studying captive populations of even well-studied species who monitored vocalisations of males vs females discovered sex-specific vocalisations. For example, it was found that females signal to male song in domestic Canaries *Serinus cnaria*. Researchers studying captive populations of White-crowned Sparrows also discovered that females sing, as well as the function of their song.

You too can contribute therefore to advancing the documentation and understanding of female bird song. To learn more and contribute, there is a citizen science project called the Female Bird Song Project (see links below). This project is an international initiative based at Leiden University and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, with collaborators across Europe, North America, and Australasia. Here, you can find more information, as well as tools and resources, for where to document female bird song, and how to deposit observations and recordings in biological collections (namely, eBird and xeno-canto), including best practices, tips for recognising female birds, and target species lists. Whenever possible, a written description of female bird song should be accompanied by archived photos, audio, and/or video files to preserve visual or acoustic features, and all documentation should include metadata indicating the singer's sex and how that was determined. You can also raise awareness by disseminating your findings.

FURTHER READING

The Female Bird Song Project
Website: **www.femalebirdsong.org**
Facebook: **www.facebook.com/femalebirdsong**
Twitter: **www.twitter.com/femalebirdsong**

WILD CORNER

THE IMPORTANCE OF Feathers

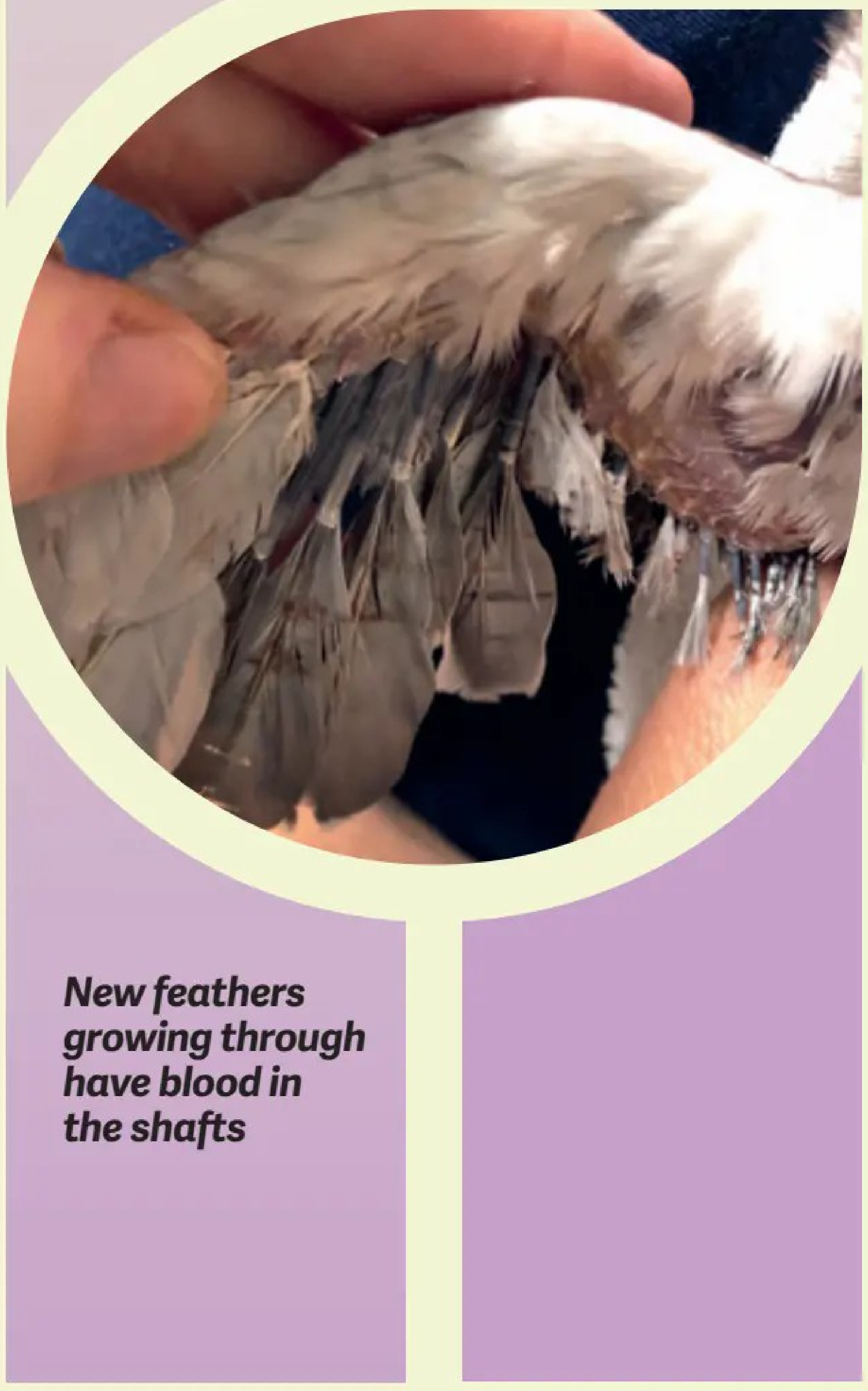
AUTHOR & PHOTOS
DR CLAUDE LACASSE
DVM, MANZCVS
(Australian Wildlife)

"SETH" the Crested Pigeon was easily picked up on the ground, unable to fly away. The pigeon was alert and active but there was something wrong with its right wing. "Seth" was anaesthetized with isoflurane for examination and radiographs. No fractures were detected but the right wing was missing about 5 primary flight feathers and all the secondary feathers. The feathers had been completely pulled out without any parts of the feathers remaining. After administering an anti-inflammatory (meloxicam) and subcutaneous fluids, the pigeon was hospitalised to monitor if the feathers would regrow properly.

'Seth' the Crested Pigeon

Feathers are often forgotten as one of the most important 'parts' of a bird. Damaged feathers can be just as debilitating as a fractured wing. Contrary to popular belief, a broken feather does not simply 'regrow' unless the entire shaft is removed, either by manually pulling the feather or naturally through moulting. Therefore, when the feathers are broken rather than completely removed, just leaving the feathers to 'regrow' is useless until the bird moults naturally, a process that can take up to a year. The best option when part of the shaft is still present (a broken feather) is to either proceed with imping (a procedure using feathers from a donor) or gently pull the broken feather under anaesthesia to encourage the feather to regrow (creating a 'fake moult'). This can be achieved easily on the tail; however, the wing feathers are tightly attached to the bone and pulling them can sometimes result in damage to the feather attachments, preventing regrowth.

In my experience, I have found that some bird species have better feather-regrowing abilities than others. Luckily for 'Seth', pigeons have a great ability to regrow feathers quickly when pulled and the feathers usually start growing back within 10 days of removal. However, other species like kookaburras or lorikeets for example, sometimes do not have as much success and the feathers do not grow back, leaving the bird unable to fly. It is extremely important to properly assess feather damage to determine if the entire shaft has been removed completely or if the feather is still attached and broken. This will determine the most appropriate treatment option. New growing feathers have blood inside the shafts so have a blue colour (see photo).



New feathers growing through have blood in the shafts

'Seth' recovered fully but many of the new feathers got damaged as they were growing back and had to be pulled and regrow a second time. Luckily, after two months, all the flight feathers and most of the secondary feathers finally grew back and the pigeon was able to fly and was subsequently returned to the wild.

A Blue-fronted Amazon Amazona aestiva on public display in Bolivia.
PHOTO MAURICIO HERRERA

Parrots in the Neotropics

TOP THE LIST OF WILD PETS AND THE OVERLOOKED HEALTH RISKS

AUTHOR
DR DAVID WAUGH
Correspondent, Loro Parque Fundación

A Nicaraguan native with her pet Yellow-naped Amazon Amazona auropalliata
PHOTO CAROL CHAMBERS PASO PACÍFICO

I HAZARD a guess that most readers of this article who keep birds have reasonable access to veterinary care for their charges, they keep themselves informed of what they should do to foster good health in their birds and act on the information accordingly. Nevertheless, there are always instances where the health of birds, and owners, is neglected, even in countries with ample resources dedicated to the subject. Such neglect increases health risks, and if this is the case in well-resourced countries, what might be the risks in the countries where useful information is scant, appropriate veterinary attention is hard to find, and there is insufficient awareness to use either?

Some answers to that question are available from a recently published study* which examines the keeping of individuals of wild species as pets in the Neotropics (Central and South America and the Caribbean) and the associated health risks not just for the pets, but also for wildlife, livestock and humans. With financial support from the Loro Parque Fundación provided via Dr Jose Tella of the Department of Conservation Biology,

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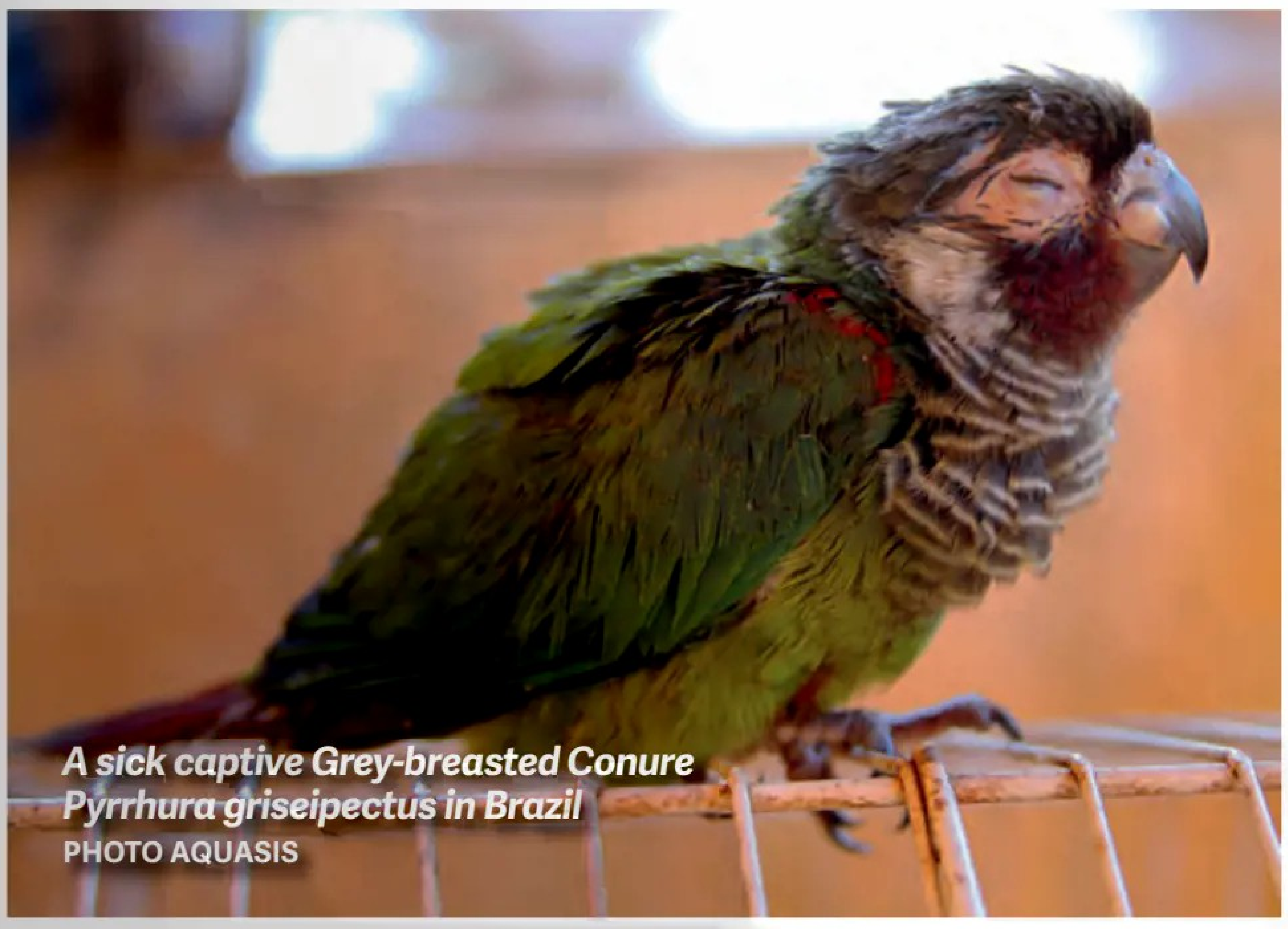
Doñana Biological Station CSIC in Spain, he and ten other researchers from research institutions and conservation organisations in Spain, Bolivia, Brazil, Germany, Mexico and Peru authored this wide-ranging study, and their results are sobering.

From 2011 to 2023, the researchers collected information on household pets illegally removed from the wild in the Neotropics, from Argentina to Mexico and the Dominican Republic. They surveyed rural human settlements along approximately 51,000 km of mostly secondary and unsurfaced roads crossing the main biomes and habitats of each country. They registered wild-caught individuals of any native vertebrate species that were kept in captivity as companion animals (pets), as well as recording the presence of exotic pets (species not native to the Neotropics). Most pets were on view in the street or in public establishments (e.g. shops, hostels) because public display of poached animals is widespread in rural Neotropical areas, where regulations against poaching are seldom actively enforced. However, given that wildlife ownership is predominantly an illegal activity, when the researchers met owners of pets more information was volunteered through informal conversations rather than formal survey methods.

The researchers recorded 9,970 wild-caught pets in 6,606 houses in 2,663 (94.7 percent) of the 2,811 rural localities surveyed across 15 countries with different economies. Pets were mainly birds (98 percent), but also mammals (1.5 percent) and reptiles (0.4 percent) out of a total of 274 species. Most (98 percent) of these species were native to the same areas where pets were recorded, usually being captured and kept in captivity by their owners or bought locally (98.6 percent). The remaining small proportion (1.4 percent) was purchased at markets or from private sellers in distant localities. Wild pets were found to be kept in close contact with humans, in isolated cages or sharing space with poultry, free-ranging inside and/or outside the houses, placed in close contact with food or parts of houses such as the dining room or bedrooms, and even sharing food when people eat.

Parrots were the most common wild-caught pets in these rural areas, representing only 32 percent of the species but 78 percent of all individuals recorded. Depending on which country, between 33 percent and 70 percent of the interviewed people have or recently had wild-caught parrot pets in rural areas, while between 50 percent and 90 percent knew someone who has or had at least one. Within the families keeping wild-caught parrots, women (mothers) most often cared for these pets (53.2 percent), followed by men (fathers; 43.5 percent) and other family members (3.3 percent). Most of these parrots were kept in cages, with 39.6 percent of them free-roaming inside and/or outside the house, often after cutting some flight feathers to prevent them from flying away.

The owners informed the researchers of the causes for the loss of 568 wild-caught parrots: 27.1 percent escaped into the wild after their cut feathers had moulted and they were able to fly, and the rest (72.9 percent) died. When the cause of death was known (for 141 individuals), most deaths were from


A sick captive Grey-breasted Conure Pyrrhura griseipectus in Brazil
PHOTO AQUASIS

Hispaniolan Parakeet Psittacara chloropterus chicks being sold illegally on roadside in the Dominican Republic
PHOTO P.G. RODRIGUEZ

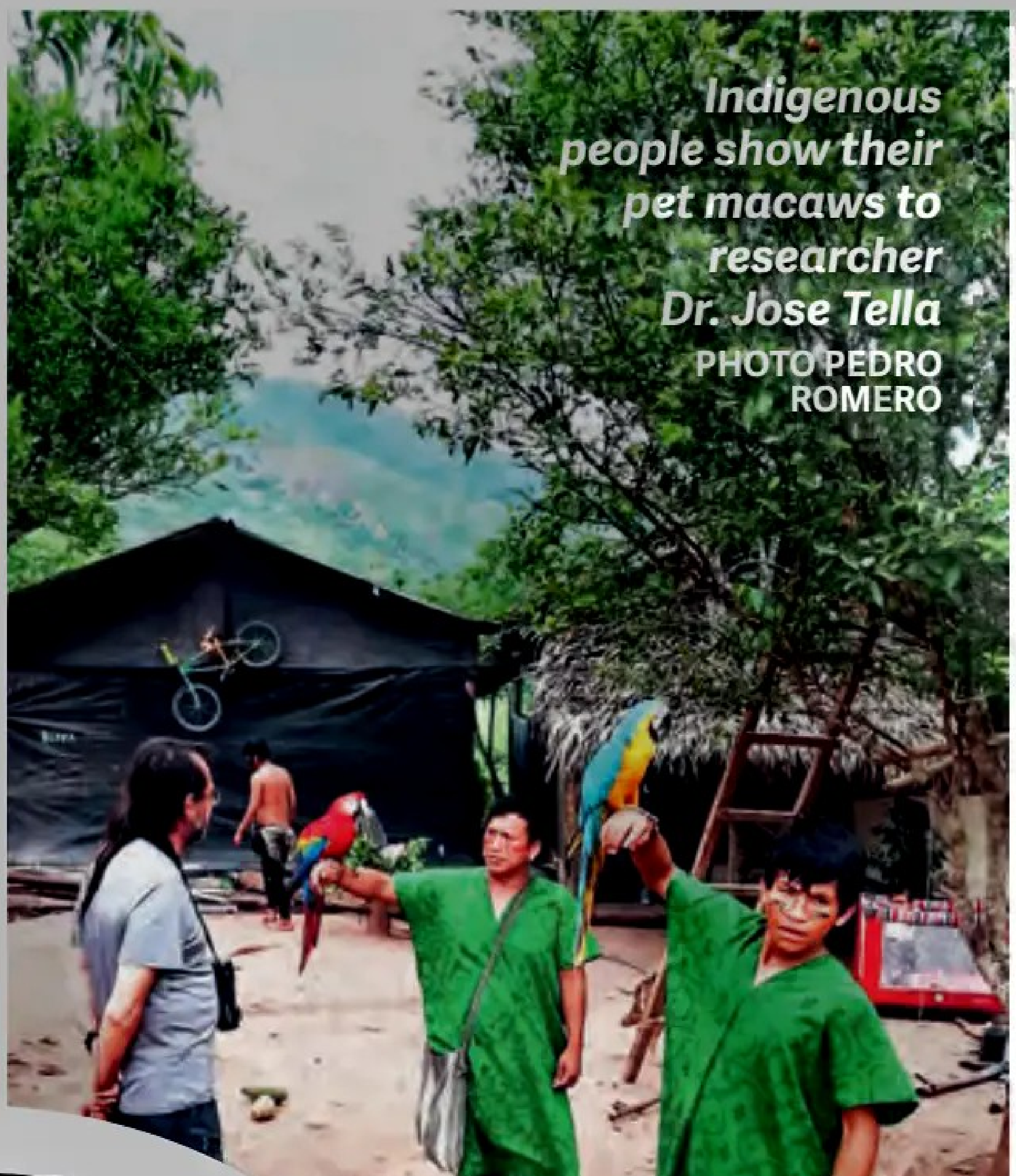
A Green-winged Macaw Ara chloroptera next to a monkey on public display in Bolivia
PHOTO MAURICIO HERRERA

A mixed species group in Peru – Red-masked Parakeets Psittacara erythrogenys, Pacific Parrotlets Forpus coelestis and Tropical Mockingbirds Mimus gilvus
PHOTO M. ROSALES

Confiscations of illegally held wildlife do happen
PHOTO POLICIA NACIONAL DE COLOMBI

Blue and Gold Macaw Ara ararauna chicks poached from the wild
PHOTO MAURICIO HERRERA

Pet Yellow-shouldered Amazons Amazona barbadensis and Brown-throated Conures Eupsittula pertinax roaming the kitchen
PHOTO MAR CARRASCO


Indigenous people show their pet macaws to researcher Dr. Jose Tella
PHOTO PEDRO ROMERO

A girl in Tlacotepec, Mexico with her pet native finches
PHOTO BLANCA ROLDÁN

A Cuban girl with her pet Cuban Parakeet Psittacara euops
PHOTO MAIKEL CAÑIZARES

Scarlet Macaws Ara macao are the target of poaching. Here is a wild chick in the nest
PHOTO CHARLES BRITT

disease (47.5 percent), followed by predation by domestic or wild animals (36.9 percent) and accidents (15.6 percent). In the case of parrot pets whose age was known and given by the owners, they died at a median age of 1 year (range of 10 days to 60 years for 182 individuals) or were still alive at a median age of 2 years (range of 20 days to 60 years for 2,115 individuals). Regrettably, old age was never mentioned as a cause of death. Besides wild-caught species, the researchers also recorded 1,576 exotic pets (13.6 percent of all pets) belonging to 24 species. All of them were birds, about 70 percent being parrots native to Australia, Asia and Africa bred in captivity in unknown localities. Exotic birds were kept in cages and in 2.1 percent of cases were kept together with wild-caught native pets. Considering all wild-caught and exotic pet species together, the number of animals and species kept per family (total of 6,606 families) ranged from 1 to 200 (average 2.4) and 1 to 47 (average 1.4), respectively.

To emphasise the potential risks related to these pets, the researchers list 41 examples of infectious diseases and parasites that can be transmitted between species of wild-caught birds found as pets, exotic pet birds, poultry and humans (zoonoses). These example diseases include 15 viral (e.g. avian influenza, avian bornavirus, Newcastle disease, beak and feather disease), 15 bacterial (e.g. chlamydophilosis, salmonellosis, tuberculosis), 8 protozoan (e.g. toxoplasmosis, avian malaria), 2 fungal (e.g. cryptococcosis) and one other (allergic alveolitis). They also listed 43 cases of the key orders of birds acting as reservoirs for all the disease pathogens implicated and found parrots (Psittaciformes) to be most frequent (44.2 percent), followed by perching/songbirds (Passeriformes) (27.9 percent), game birds/poultry (Galliformes) (23.3 percent) and ducks/geese (Anseriformes) and pigeons/doves (Columbiformes) each 2.3 percent. In relation to the relative transmission of the listed diseases and parasites, 95 percent could be transmitted in wild-caught birds, 92 percent in exotic birds, 88 percent in poultry and even 61 percent in humans.

Evidently, there are health risks to bringing wild animals prone to carrying parasites and pathogens into close contact with humans and their exotic pets and livestock. Although animal pathogens and parasites have been transmitted to humans for centuries (in the Neotropics the tradition goes back to pre-Columbian times), the current trend of human population growth and connectivity can increase the risk of zoonotic outbreaks spreading much faster (think Covid-19). Disease transmission from humans and poultry to wild animals is also predicted to be facilitated via wild pets, precipitating conservation problems. While some previous studies have underlined the risk of cross-species disease transmission posed by wildlife markets in cities, they have ignored the risk associated with widespread pet ownership of wild animals poached locally in rural areas. Hence the importance of this study supported by the Loro Parque Fundación which demonstrates the geographic and social dimensions of the issue, urging an integrated approach to reduce this illegal activity, and to strengthen health surveillance of seized individuals and people in close contact with poached pets, which would benefit both people and wildlife.

*Romero-Vidal, P., Blanco, G., Barbosa, J. M., Carrete, M., Hiraldo, F., Pacífico, E. C., Rojas, A., Bermúdez-Cavero, A.O., Díaz-Luque, J.A., León-Pérez, R. & Tella, J. L. (2024). The widespread keeping of wild pets in the Neotropics: An overlooked risk for human, livestock and wildlife health. *People and Nature.*

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PO Box 5471, West Bundaberg Qld 4670. Meetings are every 3rd Tuesday of the month, at Family Centre, Old Bundaberg Showgrounds, Bundaberg at 7.30pm. New members and visitors most welcome. Enquiries Phone John Tadgell **0459 361 634**

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